

# GREAT ENGLISH PAINTERS

BY  
FRANCIS DOWNMAN  
CHECKE

WITH THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

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## PREFACE

*THIS book is not mainly concerned with great English painting, but with some great English painters. It is a book of lives, not a book of critical studies. During the ten years last past, every one of the masters who figure in the following pages has had a monograph or two consecrated to his art; and the students who desire to know all about a particular master's glazing and scumbling, or his pigments and his vehicles, have already been well provided for. This more modest volume, however, offers little technical information. It attempts to state not how the English masterpieces were painted but what manner of men they were who painted them.*

*The Author does not believe that the eight painters he has discussed are the eight greatest that England has produced. For himself, he finds Lawrence, for example, far less valuable and interesting than Girtin and Cozens and Bonington, than "Old Crome" and Cotman, than Richard*

*Wilson, and even James Ward. But there are good reasons for including Lawrence in this volume. Like Hogarth's, Reynolds', Gainsborough's, and Romney's, his fortunes were bound up with Garrick's; and as the last of the notable line of artists who painted Mrs. Siddons, he rounds off an epoch. Again, Lawrence demands notice, if only on account of those French critics who so absurdly place him in the brightest constellation of English artists, with only Constable and Gainsborough as his superiors. As for Turner, surely one cannot be expected to take quite seriously the small reaction against him which followed the death of Ruskin.*

*In fixing upon Hogarth as the starting-point for what follows, it is not suggested that no respectable native painting was being practised in England before Hogarth reached his prime. Practically all the pre-Hogarthian artists criticised by Horace Walpole were aliens, it is true. But one might fairly say, "There are more things in English painting, Horatio, than e'er were dreamt of in your Anecdotes." Side by side with Kneller and Lely and even with Van Dyck, Englishmen were working to repair the disasters of the Commonwealth's*

*rule. Probably there was never a phase of English painting worthy to be compared with that magnificent phase of English music in which the polyphonists Bird and Tallis proved themselves almost the equals of Orlandus Lassus and Palestrina ; but time will show that Hogarth's English predecessors were not all journeymen hacks. Some of them travelled so far as to be interested in brush-work for its own sake, and they theorised earnestly about their calling. But while these honourable pioneers demand grateful mention in a Preface, it is certain that the little we know of their lives and works would hardly interest the general reader.*

*Again, the fact that the latest artists noticed in these pages are Turner and Constable does not necessarily imply that the succession of great English painters has been broken. Watts is too recently dead for proper treatment in a mainly biographical volume. Certain other lately lauded artists, whom it would be unbecoming to name, are dead in more senses than one. As for the pre-Raphaelites, for the present enough has been published in their honour.*

*Eight painters are not many ; but when other-*

*wise well-informed men and women still go up and down the highways and byways of Europe declaring that, although we have had one or two painters of genius, there is no such thing as English painting in a broad sense, the bringing together of even eight of our masters in one small book may be useful. A rapid survey of the five generations from Hogarth to Turner shows that Englishmen can hold up their heads. With our love of wood and field and river, we have led the way in landscape-painting. Wherever Frenchmen have equalled us in this matter, they have done so as disciples of our Constable : for the prodigiously clever legerdemain of contemporary French impressionists is not landscape-painting so much as chromatic variations on a landscape-theme, in which one is challenged to marvel at an artist or his art instead of some mood of Nature. As painters of animals we have beaten the Dutch : for the Dutch have represented animals either as property or as victuals, as live-stock or dead provender, while we have shown birds and beasts living their own lives or blithely sharing ours. As religious painters we have done little, and generally we have done it badly. But the reasons*



*for this are historical, not æsthetical; we have lacked opportunities rather than gifts. If we have failed in the grand style of historical painting, for which Reynolds and Romney and Lawrence and even Hogarth sighed, part of the explanation is that our national temperament is hardly rhetorical enough for the task. Historical painting is more at home in countries where the citizens don decorated evening clothes after breakfast, and indulge themselves in processions and speech-makings on the smallest provocation.*

*But perhaps the most brilliant achievement of English painting is in the region which, if popular misconceptions of our racial character were truths, would be for ever barred to us. Our English portrait-painters' women are fit to hang in the same gallery with our English Shakespeare's heroines. No guitar-strumming Latin with his desperate vows, no gallant Gaul with his sparkling flatteries, no sentimental Teuton with his immense infatuation—not one of these has portrayed women with the robust yet tender chivalry, the keen yet reverent insight, of the nation which allows itself to be represented as a beefy John Bull with a brutal dog*

*at his huge feet. The truth is that we are a nation in love, either with real or with ideal women, and that our painters are always revealing a fact which we uncouthly try to dissemble. Yet our best painters have maintained herein a good deal of English reserve, and it is the weakness of Lawrence that he abandoned this reserve for mawkish exaggeration.*

*These lines are penned in the city of Ribera's "Immaculata," at a sufficient distance from the great English collections to make an impartial retrospect possible. Recalling the classics of our painting in such circumstances, one is sensible of its faults. One feels in it that insular touch which has been the making of so much of our culture and the marring of so much more. One feels, too, the lack of daring, or rather, the love of solidity which caused our cathedral builders to stop at seventy feet where a Frenchman or a Spaniard would have soared to a hundred and fifty. But, above all, one feels that in the land where we have had great building, very great poetry, and very great music, we have indeed had great painting too.*

*Salamanca,*

*Sept. 29, 1908.*

# HOGARTH

(1697-1764)

“NUTS and damsons! Nuts and damsons! Sir, have you seen the Tiger? This way for *Jephthah's Rash Vow*. Pray, Sir, have you seen ‘The Horse and No Horse,’ whose tail stands where his head should do? Nuts and damsons! Nuts and damsons!”

These and a hundred other cries and coaxings beat upon the ears of Monsieur Sorbière, an adventurous Frenchman who had found his way to Smithfield one September evening in the year 1698. Nor were there surprises for his ears alone. His nostrils received the savours of be-spiced sausages and of be-sauced piglets, roasted whole on spits before glowing logs. His eyes opened wide at such sights as two-headed calves, men eating fire and swallowing swords, and charming ladies weighing thirty stone apiece. A sign over a booth announced

that, by parting from an English coin, he could witness *The Creation of the World*, with Noah and his beasts leaving the ark, Dives rising up in Hell, and Lazarus lying snugly in Abraham's bosom. Meanwhile horns, trumpets, drums, bells, and rattles made so enormous a din that the gamesters and the practitioners of worse vices could find peace and quietness only in the cloisters of the Norman church hard by. The church was St. Bartholomew's; and the annual pandemonium which outraged its sanctity was Bartholomew Fair.

At the time of Monsieur Sorbière's visit, a ten-months-old baby boy was lying within ear-shot of the uproar in Bartholomew Close. He was not of Cockney stock. Good yeoman blood ran in his little veins; and, years before, his father had taught a village school among the lakes and fells of Westmorland. The child's name was William Hogarth; and he was destined to become the most popular, though not the greatest, of English painters.

It is strange that so many writers who have busied their pens with Hogarth's life and works have failed to recognise Bartholomew Fair as

one of the strongest influences upon the young artist's mind. Foremost among the open-air entertainments which visitors to the Fair could see for nothing were the stages on which one Merry Andrew after another would satirise the society and politics of the hour. Sometimes their lashes stung the Government into active resentment, as when a pig was publicly roasted over a fire which the Merry Andrew professed to feed with depreciated paper money. But, as a rule, the satire was of the well-worn, obvious order which reappears in Hogarth's prints and paintings.

Bartholomew Fair, however, did not merely incline young Hogarth's mind in a satirical direction. It seems to have supplied a great deal of the letter as well as nearly all the spirit of his art. The picturesque crowding of oddly mingled and restless figures, which is so distinctive of Hogarth, is easy to account for when we think of the kaleidoscopic Fair's swaying masses of people, with here and there, in sharp contrast, a stage full of mimic kings and queens and heroes, over-dressed and over-posed. Little would be left in Hogarth's gallery if one were

to banish his one-legged sailors, and pick-pockets, and dwarfs, and young bloods making ducks and drakes of their money, and strolling players, and 'prentices, and gamblers, and courtesans, and pimps and bawds, and bullies, all greedy for ill-gotten money or hectic pleasure. And these were the very types thronging Bartholomew Fair. Hogarth's childhood synchronised with the Fair's best (or worst) days. By the time he was a boy of twelve, things had reached such a pitch that the Fair's annual black-list of killings and woundings and rob-bings would have appalled a Restoration rake. Accordingly, in 1708, its duration was abridged from fourteen days to three. But, for better or worse, it had served Hogarth's turn. His most impressionable years had been spent at a stone's-throw from this microcosm of the town's vice and folly, and its memories abode sharp and bright in his tenacious mind.

The magnificent Horace Walpole, whose father had not disdained to eat crackling pork and apple sauce in the cook-booths of the Fair, haughtily tells us that "William Hogarth was the son of a low tradesman who bound him to

a mean engraver." The "mean engraver" in question was Mr. Ellis Gamble, who carried on his contemptible business with disgusting conscientiousness in Cranbourne Street, Leicester Fields. William's father was impressed by his boy's graphic gift. He was astonishingly skilful in seizing and recording facial expression, and he covered himself with glory during his apprenticeship by a sketch of a quarrelsome tippler in the act of having his head broken by another quarrelsome tippler's pewter pot. Unfortunately, Mr. Ellis Gamble was not, like Basire to whom Blake was bound apprentice, an engraver of pictures. He was a modest engraver of heraldic emblems upon silver plate. But one can learn a good deal from copying lions and unicorns a thumb-nail high.

William Hogarth was born on November 10th, 1697; and we know that by April 23rd, 1720, his apprenticeship was ended and he was in business on his own account. The date on his first trade-card was a good omen; for April 23rd is not only the feast of Saint George, patron of England, but also the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and death. The young

business man, however, began operations modestly. Bill-heads and cards for "low tradesmen" were his staple product; and it was only by slow degrees that he advanced to the dignity of a book-illustrator and occasional cartoonist. *Masquerades and Operas* and a dozen illustrations from "Hudibras" are the principal but almost negligible survivors of his early efforts; and, by the time he was thirty Hogarth had accomplished little more than nothing. But his chance came and he took it.

An art school was opened near Covent Garden, with Sir James Thornhill as director; and one of the first students to present himself was William Hogarth. For two years the tradesman's engraver worked hard at the painter's art; and perhaps he would have worked still harder and far longer if he had not fallen in love. Awkwardly enough, the lady chosen for him by fate was none other than Sir James's only daughter. Both Hogarth and Miss Thornhill believed that it would be much worse than useless to seek the paternal permission, and so they ran away. It was for the best. Hogarth seems to have assimilated all that the art school



could teach him, and his further education in painting and engraving came by way of the industrious practice of his art for daily bread.

The runaways chose their cottage on the Surrey side; and, with the shining and almost bridgeless Thames for a broad moat between the bride and her angry father, they settled down to work. The neighbouring Vauxhall Gardens were rising into their full fame, and Jonathan Tyers, the owner, good-naturedly found a few little jobs of engraving and decorative painting for Hogarth to do. So pleasant became their relations that the old man gave the young one a "pass," engraved on gold, which would admit Hogarth and his friends—"a coachful"—to the Gardens in perpetuity. And Vauxhall Gardens completed what Bartholomew Fair had begun. Although, to a certain extent, the inquisitive or more vicious rich had visited the Fair, it had been pre-eminently a festival of the people: but, at Vauxhall, Hogarth was able to observe at close quarters a more fashionable society. It is true that Tyers' patrons included too many of the precious men and women affected by Goldsmith's incomparable Mr. Tibbs. But to Hogarth, who

did not at any time in his career have the run of the stately homes of England, Vauxhall was better than nothing. As the interesting husband of Sir James Thornhill's handsome daughter, and as the protégé of Jonathan Tyers, he was able to rub shoulders with celebrities, thus acquiring a self-confidence which expressed itself in *The Man of Taste*, a composition in which Pope and the architect Kent are irreverently treated.

After his elopement, Hogarth's personal history was almost bare of excitement and adventure. The British Museum treasures a manuscript, with Hogarth's own illustrations, chronicling an unimportant jaunt to the Isle of Sheppey, and he also made a journey to Calais which yielded him the supreme thrill of his career. For the rest, we must fall back upon the just remark of one of his early biographers: "His Life is in his Pictures." While he was at work, his multitudinous creations were so real to him that their hates and loves and splendours and miseries were his own. They were his cup-bearers; and he drank through them so deeply of human life that he was content to be humdrum in his own daily intercourse with the outer world.



THE SHRIMP-GIRL

By

WILLIAM HOGARTH

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

It was with the six pictures called *A Harlot's Progress* that Hogarth laid hold upon fame. Of the original paintings only one has survived, the others having perished in one of those Job-like catastrophes which fell upon the parvenu Beckford's palace at Fonthill. But although five of the canvases are no more, all the world knows the grievous history of poor Moll Hackabout from the thousands of good, bad, and indifferent impressions which Hogarth, and his foes the pirates, printed from their copper-plates. To say that *A Harlot's Progress* is famous by reason of its artistic qualities would be absurd. Its immeasurable popularity is mainly due to the fact that the six pictures re-tell clearly and boldly a story of evergreen interest, and that, by rubbing in a stern moral, they win over those who would otherwise find them objectionable. In only one of the half-dozen canvases (No. II, the sole survivor, which is in the possession of the Earl of Wemyss) are there any signs of the poor *fille de joie* having enjoyed herself; and, even in this scene, she is kicking over the tea-table. In the third scene she has sunk into squalor and crime; in the fourth she

suffers indignities in prison ; in the fifth she dies ; and in the sixth her own child sits contentedly winding a top beside her coffin. Morbidly greedy of sordid horrors, Hogarth's contemporaries pounced upon the poor corpse of Moll Hackabout like vultures. Her Progress from happy innocence to shame and death was versified for broad-sheets, bawled by ballad-mongers, and even dramatised for the stage. Hogarth made nearly £1300 by the venture ; but other people probably made more.

*The Rake's Progress* was much better than the Harlot's. It has been suggested that its artistic superiority explains its having been less popular. But the general public does not resent good painting, so long as it is not baulked of the anecdotes and novelettes which it requires painters to narrate in their works. The reason for the Rake's slightly cooler reception lies in the fact that a fair and frail woman is more generally interesting than a spendthrift young man. One must also take account of that curious human tendency which is best illustrated by the reviewers who habitually "crab" the second book of any author who has scored a success with his

first. Further, before launching the eight engravings of *The Rake's Progress*, Hogarth had secured an exclusive right in his own designs by means of the Copyright Act of 1735, which partially disabled the pirates and thereby restricted the circulation of the new work.

In studying this second *Progress* we are at an advantage. All the originals exist. Hogarth sold them for twenty-two guineas each, and they are now in the bizarre little Soane Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Through some perversity they are so hung that Nos. V-VIII are in the places which should be occupied by Nos. I-IV; but they can be well seen, in spite of the glass which protects the pigments from the gnawing London atmosphere. For the sake of pilgrims who have only known the Rake in engravings, it may be well to explain that the figures in the paintings are "the other way round."<sup>1</sup> Non-artistic visitors, for whom the play's the thing and the play alone, generally show disappoint-

<sup>1</sup> This remark does not apply to all copper-plates after Hogarth. The engravings made direct from the pictures were "in reverse"; but some later wielders of the burin, who worked from the first engravings instead of from the paintings, "reversed" back again to the original orientation of the figures.

ment before the Soane's treasure. They have come expecting strong outline and brilliant varied colour, but they find themselves face to face with eight low-hued, old-masterly canvases in which the preacher cannot shout down the painter.

What may be called the libretto of *The Rake's Progress* has more unity than the Harlot's. Tom Rakewell's humbly born sweetheart, whom he casts off at the moment of inheriting a fortune, reappears with her little savings just as the officers of the law are about to arrest him for debt, and, faithful unto death, she is also an actor in the last scene of all when he dies in Bedlam. It is customary either to pass censure upon Hogarth for this supposed lapse into melodrama or to blame it upon friends who overrode his better judgment. But Hogarth knew what he was about. Speaking of the Progresses thirty years later he said: "I wished to compose pictures on canvas similar to representations on the stage . . . I have endeavoured to treat my subject as a dramatic writer : my picture is my stage and men and women my players." Further, there is significance in the fact that Hogarth

loved to describe himself as the "Author" rather than the Painter of the Progresses and of *Marriage à la Mode*. On this account he is sniffed at by those moderns whose talk is all of paint, paint, nothing but paint, and whose wish seems to be that a picture should have hardly any subject at all. The truth is that even a painter must have something to say, and provided he say it well, his painting is none the worse because his picture persuades somebody to behave better. Giotto, Fra Angelico, the Bellinis, Raphael, and the other great Catholic masters painted pieces which did the work of the old miracle and mystery plays of the mediæval theatre, and they did not become one whit smaller by so doing. Nor is Hogarth the smaller for his morality plays on canvas and copper. The essential point is that he painted well. As for his composition, only painters who have tried to do likewise can fully value the power and skill with which he arranges the heads and heels of his crowds.

Before the Rake made his bow to the Town, the Author's circumstances had changed. A reconciliation with Sir James Thornhill had been



brought to pass by Mrs. Hogarth and her mother. Lady Thornhill having contrived to leave a set of the *Harlot's Progress* in her husband's room, the great man condescended to praise it with the prudent remark that a painter capable of producing such representations would be able to support a wife without a dowry. Shortly afterwards the young couple appear to have made a stay under the Thornhill roof: and when Sir James died, in 1734, Hogarth succeeded to the art school. He reorganised it upon the democratic principle of equal expense-sharing and equal voting-power for all the members, and introduced the living model. For thirty years Hogarth directed this life-school in so enlightened a manner that, even if every one of his own works had perished, he would still hold a proud place in English art history. In this connection, he has always had less than his due and is still misrepresented. Burlington House, the seat of the Academy for which Thornhill and his son-in-law smoothed the way, very properly, has Hogarth's fine picture representing the life-class in session.

With his earnings from the first *Progress* the

painter was able to house himself becomingly "At the Sign of the Golden Head" in Leicester Fields. Unhappily he fondled the belief that he could do too many different things, including grand historical painting. The remarks of Reynolds on this misfortune are worth repeating. After praising Gainsborough for leaving historical painting alone, Reynolds says :—

And here it naturally occurs to oppose the sensible conduct of Gainsborough in this respect to that of our late excellent Hogarth, who, with all his extraordinary talents, was not blessed with this knowledge of his own deficiency, or of the bounds which were set to the extent of his own powers. After this admirable artist had spent the greatest part of his life in an active, busy, and, we may add, successful attention to the ridicule of life, after he had invented a new species of dramatic painting, in which probably he will never be equalled, and had stored his mind with infinite materials to explain and illustrate the domestic and familiar scenes of common life, which were generally and ought to have been always the subject of his pencil ; he very imprudently, or rather presumptuously, attempted the great historical style, for which his previous habits had by no means prepared him : he was indeed so entirely unacquainted with the principles of this style that he was not even

aware that any artificial preparation was at all necessary. It is to be regretted that any part of the life of such a genius should be fruitlessly employed. Let his failure teach us not to indulge ourselves in the vain imagination that by a momentary resolution we can give either dexterity to the hand or a new habit to the mind.<sup>1</sup>

The walls of the staircase at St. Bartholomew's Hospital received Hogarth's efforts in the grand style. The best that can be said for them is that the subjects—*The Good Samaritan* and *The Pool of Bethesda*—were intelligently chosen. Yet Hogarth's powers, in his proper field, were almost at their height about this time. For proof one has only to look at *Southwark Fair*, with its handsome girl beating a drum, the *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn*, the *Distressed Poet*, which rivals *Southwark Fair* as regards the good looks of its leading lady, and *The Four Times of Day*. Before 1740, Hogarth had also painted *Captain Coram*, the best of all his single portraits and his own prime

<sup>1</sup> Reynolds' Fourteenth Discourse. The discourser's mind seems to have been working mainly upon Hogarth's *Sigismunda*, painted when the artist was sixty years old ; but Reynolds' remarks apply with greater force to Hogarth's frescoes and biblical paintings.



favourite. The *Captain Coram* may still be seen at the Foundling Hospital along with Hogarth's magnificent *March to Finchley* (1750) and his miserable *Moses brought before Pharaoh's Daughter* (1752), of which Horace Walpole justly said, that if the painter meant it to be taken seriously, he ought to have been confined in a strait-jacket.

It was in 1745, when he was in his forty-eighth year, that Hogarth's masterpiece was completed. This was the *Marriage à la Mode*, a Progress in six tableaux. The original paintings hang in the National Gallery, facing such notable works from the same brush as the amazingly fine portrait of Hogarth's sister, the six heads of his servants, *Calais Gate*, the unlucky *Sigismunda*, *The Shrimp-Girl*, the *Portrait of Miss Lavinia Fenton as Polly Peachum* in "*The Beggars' Opera*," and Hogarth's portrait of himself with his Dog Trump. The plot of *Marriage à la Mode* is sordid. Viscount Squanderfield marries "beneath him" for money. Boredom on both sides leads to dishonour and early death. The third scene is unclear; indeed, all one can be sure of is that Mr. Austin

Dobson is wrong in supposing that Viscount Squanderfield is threatening the quack's wife with his cane, and that her curious clasp-knife is being drawn in defence. The shame and horror of the last two scenes are so great that one cannot wonder at Hogarth's resolving to take their bitter taste out of people's mouths by painting a companion series to be called *The Happy Marriage*. True, *The Happy Marriage* idea was never realised; but it is worth noting that Hogarth, who was not a satirist of the sour-hearted order, at least proposed it.

As painting, *Marriage à la Mode* stands high. The second scene, here reproduced, is quite original in composition, and the drawing of the husband is a marvel of observation and expression. The clock shows that it is twenty minutes past noon, yet the candles are still burning and the disorder of an all-night entertainment has not been removed. Viscount Squanderfield has just returned from his independent pleasures, and he sprawls, with broken sword and untied hair, not even doffing his hat, before his burgess bride. The strait-laced steward, with one paid bill and a dozen unpaid in his hand, departs in self-

righteous horror from a master who will give his affairs no attention. Beyond the blue marble columns, a footman yawns as openly as his mistress.

While the *Marriage* series was being engraved, Hogarth decided to get the original paintings of the earlier Progresses off his hands. Accordingly he announced a sale by auction on unfamiliar lines. A special clock was prepared so as to strike at intervals of five minutes. The auction was to begin punctually at the hour appointed ; and, at the end of the first five minutes, picture Number One in the catalogue was to be knocked down. At ten minutes past the hour the clock was similarly to cut short the bidding for Number Two, and so on, till all the lots were disposed of. No bidder was to advance less than gold. These extraordinary arrangements repelled the majority of picture-buyers, with the result that the six pictures of the almost world-famous *Harlot's Progress* went for fourteen guineas apiece, the whole sale producing much less than £500. But the sale had its humours. One old beau on crutches, who wished to be taken for a sad dog and a deuce of a fellow, made a bid for the

*Rake*, exclaiming, "I *will* bid for my own Progress!"

Learning the wrong lesson from this disaster, Hogarth advertised *Marriage à la Mode* for sale, in 1750, on equally unpractical lines. No dealers were to be admitted to the room, and bidding was to be by written notes only. The highest bidder by noon on June 6th was to secure the paintings. When the day came the dealers were not the only people to stay away. Indeed, as Mr. John Lane, of Hillingdon, entered the room he saw that he and Hogarth and Hogarth's friend had the whole place to themselves. At noon Mr. Lane's bid of twenty pounds for each of the six pictures was both the highest and the lowest. The one and only bidder behaved handsomely. Not only did he "make it guineas," but he gave Hogarth a few hours to find a better bid. The better bid was not forthcoming, and Mr. Lane became the owner of *Marriage à la Mode* for £126. In 1797 the set was sold for a thousand guineas.

The next Progress, *Industry and Idleness* (1747), is most precious to artists on the strength of the preliminary drawings preserved in the Print



Room of the British Museum. The Print Room officials will show them to any serious student who will take the trouble to ask for a sight of them ; and, until he has seen them, no admirer of Hogarth knows how great a master this artist was. The sixth scene, with an advancing line of drummers, is beyond praise.<sup>1</sup> But, to most people, *Industry and Idleness* will continue to be known in the engraved copies. The twelve compositions set forth the life histories of two apprentices, the Idler being finally swung off at Tyburn while the other marries his master's daughter and becomes Lord Mayor of London. This longest of Hogarth's moralities smacks too much of the late Mr. Samuel Smiles for some tastes : but it contains some of the most striking of the many fine passages which abound in Hogarth's works. And it is just possible that, here and there, shrewd satire lurks under the conventional morality. The smug Industrious Apprentice "fulfilling his Christian duty" in church in company with an engaging young

<sup>1</sup> A coloured reproduction of this drawing will be found in the 1902 edition of *William Hogarth*, by Austin Dobson. This, by far the best work on the subject, contains a too short but valuable note on Hogarth as a painter by Sir Walter Armstrong.

woman certainly seems to be making the best of both worlds.

The following year Hogarth executed his *Paul before Felix*; also a burlesque print with the same title said to be aimed at the school of Rembrandt. If the subject were not a sacred one, Hogarth's serious effort would be the more laughable of the two. After completing it he set out for France. Pooh-poohing everything French, he allowed his insular prejudices to deprive him of nearly all the pleasure and profit he ought to have won from his voyage. An indiscreet attempt to sketch one of the gates of the town caused him to be first locked up as a spy and then deported to England. That ill-tempered and unpleasing caricature, in elaborate paint, known as *Calais Gate; or the Roast Beef of Old England* was his revenge for this indignity. The huge sirloin figured in the picture is supposed to be on its way to the "Lion d'Argent," for the dinner of some English travellers, and the thin French soldiers who gaze at it so hungrily and enviously are supposed to be "frog-eaters." The lines under his print, *The Invasion*, further reveal Hogarth's degree of

enlightenment in regard to his neighbours across the Channel. They run :—

. . . But soon we'll teach these bragging foes  
That beef and beer give heavier blows  
Than soup and roasted frogs.

In 1751, when a Bill to restrict the sale of ardent spirits was before the country, Hogarth came forward with *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane*. In the first print a burly and happy populace may be seen putting down pots of honest ale. Everybody has work and wages save the poor pawnbroker, who is taking in his own modest supply of liquid through a hole in the door for fear of the bailiffs. Underneath this idyllic scene run the doggerel verses :—

Beer, happy produce of our isle,  
Can sinewy strength impart ;  
And, wearied with fatigue and toil,  
Can cheer each manly heart.

Labour and Art, upheld by thee,  
Successfully advance ;  
We quaff the balmy juice with glee,  
And water leave to France.

Genius of health ! thy grateful taste  
Rivals the cup of Jove ;  
And warms each generous English heart  
With liberty and love.

In *Gin Lane* horrors unmentionable are piled on horrors unthinkable. The buildings of the Lane are toppling ruins, and only the undertaker and the pawnbroker are flourishing—all through Gin, “the cursed fiend, the deadly draught, the damnéd cup.” On first thoughts one is tempted to complain that Hogarth has shouted out his message too loudly. But he knew that there were dull ears and slow wits among his contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> Reproached on one occasion with the roughness of his methods as an engraver, he defended his bold strong strokes by saying that “as they were addressed to hard hearts he left them hard.” And how hard human hearts could be he showed in *The Four Stages of Cruelty*, the Progress which followed *Gin Lane*. In the First Stage such fiendish cruelty is being practised on poor birds and beasts that a boy springs forward offering a tart as their ransom. Part of the under-running legend is:—

Behold a youth of gentle heart,  
To spare the creature's pain,  
“Oh, take,” he cries, “take all my tart.”  
But tears and tart are vain.

<sup>1</sup> As there are among ours. In *William Hogarth*, by G. Elliot Anstruther, London, 1902, *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street* are twice referred to as “two pictures illustrative of the drink-evil, far overdone in their horrible directness.”



THE MARCH TO FINCHLEY

By

WILLIAM HOGARTH

*After the Painting at the Foundling Hospital*

One condones the verses for the sake of the human kindness. Tolerable poetry was plentiful in Hogarth's century; but mercy to dumb beasts did not superabound.

Soon after finishing the *Four Stages* the "Author" came forward as an author in the commoner sense of the word. In 1753 he published his "Analysis of Beauty." To understand this work one must go back eight years to the *Portrait of Hogarth with his Dog Trump*, which is now in the National Gallery. Across the lower left-hand corner of the portrait is traced a curving line inscribed "The line of Beauty and Grace." According to the painter, who was not without vanity, no Egyptian hieroglyphic ever provoked greater curiosity, and "The Analysis of Beauty" was written to expound the mystery. The book was professedly based on the text (attributed to Michelangelo) that a figure should always be "Pyramidal, Serpentlike, and multiplied by one, two, three." The "Analysis" is not a good book, but it has some good things. It contains a very long preface, a long introduction, and two excessively crowded and inadequate plates. Hogarth begins by complaining

that critics have called Grace the *je ne sais pas* in painting. He stands up boldly with a *je sais*. Artists, he says, should "consider objects merely as shells composed of lines." In capital letters he declares that Beauty consists of Fitness, Variety, Uniformity, Simplicity, Intricacy, and Quantity. Dealing with Intricacy he says happily:—

The active mind is ever bent to be employed. . . .

The love of pursuit is implanted in our natures. . . .

Even cats will risk the losing of their prey to chase it over again. . . .

The eye hath this sort of enjoyment in winding walks and serpentine rivers. . . .

Intricacy of form, therefore, I shall define to be that peculiarity in the lines which compose it that leads the eye a wanton kind of chase.

Of Quantity he says that

Windsor Castle is a noble instance. It is quantity with simplicity, which makes it one of the finest objects in the kingdom, though void of any regular order of architecture.

Still more remarkable is this acute question :—

Have not many Gothic buildings a great deal of consistent beauty in them? perhaps acquired by a series of improvements made from time to time by the natural persuasion of the eye which often very nearly answers the end of working by principles and sometimes begets them.

Hogarth, indeed, got so far as to perceive some of the worth of Westminster Abbey, although, as a true son of the age, he preferred St. Paul's. He admired the stone pineapples on the façade, and declared that Wren would not have used the globe and cross on the dome save for religious reasons.

Certain men of letters—drawing too widely an unconscious inference from the literary man's misconception of painting—have assumed that no painter can write. Reynolds' "Discourses" were ascribed to Burke and Malone, and probably some day Whistler's *Ten o'clock* will be credited to Mr. Charles Whibley. In the same spirit nearly all the good things in the "Analysis of Beauty" have been put down to Hogarth's friends. But there is abundant evidence that "the Author" was nimble with his pen. Take, for example, this "No Dedication," which was found among his papers:—

### THE NO DEDICATION

Not Dedicated to any Prince in Christendom for fear it might be thought an Idle piece of arrogance.

Not Dedicated to any man of quality for fear it might be thought too assuming.



Not Dedicated to any learned body of Men, as either of the Universities, or the Royal Society, for fear it might be thought an uncommon piece of Vanity.

Not Dedicated to any one particular Friend for fear of offending another.

Therefore Dedicated to Nobody.

But if for once we may suppose Nobody to be every body, as Every body is often said to be nobody, then is this work Dedicated to every body

By their most humble  
and devoted

W. HOGARTH.

Still better worth quoting is the following letter which, over the pen-name "Britophil," Hogarth addressed to the *St. James's Evening Post* of June 7-9, 1737 :—

There is another set of gentry more noxious to the Art than these, and those are your picture-jobbers from abroad, who are always ready to raise a great cry in the prints whenever they think their craft is in danger ; and indeed it is their interest to depreciate every English work, as hurtful to their trade of continually importing ship-loads of dead Christs, Holy Families, Madonas, and other dismal dark subjects, neither entertaining nor ornamental ; on which they scrawl the terrible cramp names of some Italian masters, and fix on us poor Englishmen the character of *universal*

*dupes.* If a man, naturally a judge of Painting, not bigoted to these empirics, should cast his eye on one of their sham virtuoso-pieces, he would be very apt to say, "Mr. Bubbleman, that grand Venus (as you are pleased to call it) has not beauty enough for the character of an English cook-maid." Upon which the quack answers with a confident air, "O Sir, I find that you are no connoisseur—that picture, I assure you, is in Alesso Baldovinetto's second and best manner, boldly painted and truly sublime; the contour gracious; the air of the head in the most high Greek taste, and a most divine idea it is." Then spitting on an obscure place and rubbing it with a dirty handkerchief, takes a skip to the other end of the room, and screams out in raptures, "There is an amazing touch! a man should have this picture in his collection a twelve-month before he can discover half its beauties." The gentleman (though naturally a judge of the beautiful, yet ashamed to be out of the fashion in judging for himself) with this cant is struck dumb, gives a vast sum for the picture, very modestly confesses he is indeed quite ignorant of Painting, and bestows a frame worth fifty pounds on a frightful thing, without the hard name on it not worth as many farthings.

In its time the "Analysis of Beauty" was taken seriously enough to be translated into French, Italian, and German. It promoted the bruited about of Hogarth's name, and in 1757 he received a Court appointment as Sergeant Painter

to His Majesty. The sergeant paintership was nominally worth only £10 a year, but one thing and another brought it up to £200. Meanwhile, Hogarth had finished the four paintings called *The Election*, which hang to the right and left of *The Rake's Progress* on the folding walls of the Soane Museum.

Mr. Pierpont Morgan is the lucky owner of *The Lady's Last Stake*, painted by Hogarth the year after he became Sergeant Painter. This piece earned him immediate cash and credit, but brought bitterness in its train. Sir Richard Grosvenor, having seen and admired it, commissioned a picture for himself. The result was *Sigismunda Mourning over the Heart of Guiscardo*. This was the work which called down the magniloquent regrets of Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose own *Ugolino* is more pretentious and quite as bad. Horace Walpole's refined tribute to Hogarth's performance ran :—

No more like Sigismunda than I to Hercules. Not to mention the wretched colouring, it was the representation of a wretched strumpet just turned out of keeping, and with eyes red with rage and usquebaugh tearing off the ornaments her keeper had given



SIGISMUNDA

By

WILLIAM HOGARTH

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

her . . . her fingers blooded by her lover's heart that lay before her, like a sheep's, for her dinner.

To the objection that poor *Sigismunda's* fingers are not "blooded," Horace Walpole made answer that the gore had been subsequently painted out. On this and all other points touching *Sigismunda* the visitor to the National Gallery can judge for himself. His conclusion will probably be that the picture is not nearly so good as Hogarth believed and not nearly so bad as his enemies declared it to be.

Sir Richard Grosvenor threw *Sigismunda* back on the painter's hands, and it was not sold until many years after his death. By this time Hogarth was turned sixty. From a pecuniary standpoint, art was in a depressed condition. Such money as was being spent by wealthy patrons on their own portraits did not come Hogarth's way, for the simple reason that Hogarth could not or would not give his sitters the indispensable well-bred air. Something had to be done: so Hogarth turned from general satire to party politics. His patron, Bute, becoming Prime Minister in 1762, Hogarth decided to "do something in the ministerial interest."

His old friends of the Opposition, Wilkes of the *North Briton*, and Churchill, the "Bruiser," warned him in vain that if he did not desist he must not rely on auld lang syne to save him from their wrath. Hogarth set to work on a sequence to be called *The Times*, and published the first rather ineffective plate. Wilkes was as bad as his word. Taking a leaf out of John Milton's pitiful retort to Salmasius, he struck at the artist through his wife. One of the most pathetic relics Hogarth left behind him was a copy of the *North Briton* worn by the constant pocketing and unpocketing of the days when he carried it, with a hot and bitter heart, from friend to friend. In English nearly as bad as his taste, Wilkes said:—

The favourite *Sigismunda*, the labour of so many years, the boasted effort of his art, was not human; and if the figure had any resemblance to anything ever on earth, or had any pretence to meaning or expression, it was what he had seen, or perhaps made, in real life, his own wife in an agony of passion, but of what passion no connoisseur could guess.

At the same time the Bruiser was excogitating his *Epistle to William Hogarth*, which Garrick

vainly tried to repress in these admirable words:—

I must entreat of you, by ye Regard you profess to me, that you don't tilt at my friend Hogarth till you see me. . . . He is a great and original Genius. I love him as a man and reverence him as an artist. I would not for all ye Politicks and politicians in ye Universe that you two should have the least cause of Ill-will to each other. I am sure you will not publish against him if you think twice.

Churchill's second thoughts were the same as his first. He published. But Hogarth did not take the attack lying down. He produced caricatures of both the *North Briton* and the Bruiser, exaggerating the squint of Wilkes, and depicting Churchill as a bear with a tankard of ale, a collecting-box, and other significant accessories. On the whole Hogarth did not admit that he had had the worst of it. "The pleasure and pecuniary profit which I have derived from these two engravings," he said, "together with occasional riding on horseback, have restored me to as much health as can be expected at my time of life."

But the following year he prophesied his

approaching end in the plate called *Finis; or the Bathos*. Amidst a ruined tower, a broken column, a cracked bell, a dry palette, and a confusion of useless tools and weapons Time gives up his old ghost beside his broken scythe and shattered hour-glass. Apollo lies dead in his chariot, the hands have dropped from the clock, the moon is in eclipse, a ship is sinking, and the signboard of The World's End Inn is tumbling down. A printed play is open at the final words "Exeunt Omnes"; and, so as to connect the author himself with his work, an expiring candle sets fire to a copy of his engraving, *The Times*. If Hogarth meant to be merely playful in this work—and playfulness had certainly been his intention in some similar pieces—the joke was not his best: but if, as some maintain, it was gravely done, its painfulness is extreme. It is too much like Gay's cynical epitaph,

Life is a jest, and all things show it,  
I thought so once and now I know it,

which desecrates the most honourable wall in Westminster Abbey. In any case, one could



wish that this had not been Hogarth's last picture.

On October 25th, 1764, he was borne, weak and ill, from his house at Chiswick, which still stands, to his old home in Leicester Fields. He arrived in good spirits: but the same day he died. He was buried in Chiswick churchyard. Garrick wrote this epitaph on his tomb:—

Farewell, great Painter of Mankind!

Who reach'd the noblest point of art,

Whose pictured Morals charm the Mind,

And through the Eye correct the Heart.

If genius fire thee, Reader, stay;

If Nature touch thee, drop a tear;

If neither move thee, turn away,

For Hogarth's honour'd dust lies here.

Epitaphs are written to be read with charity; and Garrick himself would not have maintained in cold blood that Hogarth indeed "reach'd the noblest point of art." Nor must Mr. Austin Dobson be taken too literally in his declaration that Hogarth was "a magnificent painter, worthy to rank in all respects with the greatest masters of the brush." Nevertheless, we must

not relapse into the old error of those who valued Hogarth as a moralist first and as a painter afterwards. The recent tendency to place him, purely as a painter, an inch or so too high, will not excuse us in dropping him, as our great-grandfathers did, a yard too low. If his compositions told no story, lashed no vice, preached up no virtue, enforced no moral—in other words, if they were simply so many detached scenes, like Van Ostade's and Jan Steen's and Wilkie's—they would still stand as a great achievement in paint from which every succeeding generation has something to learn. His *Miss Arnold* in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge; his *David Garrick and his Wife* at Windsor Castle; his *Peg Woffington*, owned by Sir Charles Tennant, and many other portraits, show how arrestive he can be even when he has no tale to tell.

As a satirist Hogarth was not subtle. But for the matter of that, neither was Juvenal. The truth is that your super-subtle satirists hardly make themselves heard or seen. Hogarth is perspicuous enough for the humblest beholder, and this is the quality which Fielding

had in mind when he said that the "Progresses" were "calculated more to serve the Cause of Virtue and for the Preservation of Mankind than all the Folios of Morality which have ever been written." His idiom was often coarse and boisterous, but his undertones breathed more of kindness than of censorious bitterness.

As documents chronicling the urban morals and manners and trappings and backgrounds of the eighteenth century, his paintings must always be of the highest value, provided the historians who consult them can do what too many of them have failed to do in the past; that is, discriminate between the normal facts and the satirical fancies. There have been many different Englands, existing side by side, at every moment since our history began, and happily, in Hogarth's day, there were sounder and cleaner Englands than his England of gaming and tippling and chambering and cheating and grabbing and wounding and killing. But he dealt faithfully with the England he knew. And, if one must take leave of this moralist with a moral reflection, let it be this: Hogarth so painted ugliness as to move the common people towards

virtue ; and thereby he was a better citizen than those who so paint beauty as to weaken the unbalanced and the non-artistic in their resolves against vice. His materials were the devil's ; his side was the angels'.

## REYNOLDS

(1723-1792)

WHILE Hogarth was at work on the first of the Progresses amidst the reek and noise of London, a child was attempting sketches on the backs of his school exercises beside a pleasant water in Devon. "This is drawn by Joshua, in school, out of pure idleness," wrote his aggrieved father on one of the sketches ; for how could he divine that the child's "pure idleness" would do what his own industriousness had failed to do and make the name of Reynolds one of the boasts of England ?

To imagine Sir Joshua Reynolds as a small boy smacks of indecorum. One has the same feeling about his great friend, Dr. Johnson. We are so accustomed to the grandiosity of these two figures—the one the oracle of Art, the other the pontiff of Literature and of almost everything else under the sun—that it is hard

to believe there was ever a time in their lives when they were not "Sir Joshua" and "the Doctor."<sup>1</sup> But, seeing that even popes and emperors have begun their careers by screaming and pulling their nurses' hair, it is lawful to say that Sir Joshua had a childhood. Indeed, his dignity suffered impudence long before he could speak ; for his name was taken in vain as soon as he had it, and he was entered in the parish register, not as Joshua but as "Joseph, son of Samuel Reynolds, Clerk."

Samuel Reynolds, Clerk, was of course a clerk in holy orders. As head-master of Plympton Earl Grammar School, he enjoyed an income which, at the present purchasing-power of money, would be about £500 a year. But he had married for love Theophila Potter, a maid whose face was all her fortune ; and, as the union was blessed with eleven or twelve children, of whom five outlived their father, the little Joshua was not spoiled by excessive luxury. Happily, Plympton Earl was a place wherein

<sup>1</sup> Reynolds himself was once irreverent enough to paint a portrait of Johnson as he imagined Johnson to have appeared at the age of two. But this was after Johnson's death.

one could make life go pleasantly on small resources. Before its upstart neighbour, Plymouth, had been so much as thought of, Plympton Earl was already an ancient town with a famous priory, a Norman castle, a mayor and alderman, a Member of Parliament, fairs and a market, all complete. Now that the estuary of the Plym has receded from its walls, Plympton's municipal glory is departed. But it keeps the cloistered school where not only Reynolds, but also the painters Northcote and Haydon and Eastlake, studied and played.

Joshua made fair headway with his Latin grammar. But his hand itched always for a pencil. One of the first books he fell upon as soon as he had learned to read was *The Jesuit's Perspective*, and by its aid he produced so tolerable a sketch of the school cloister that his father exclaimed, "This is wonderful!" Afterwards, he devoted his spare minutes to copying the quaint cuts in Jacob Cat's *Book of Emblems*, the heads in Plutarch's *Lives*, and, indeed, all the prints he could lay his hands on. From copying, he advanced to direct portraiture. The graphic arts are said to have

begun in the outline-drawings which half-savage men scratched on the walls of caves ; and the almost innumerable sequence of Joshua Reynolds' portraits similarly began on the whitewashed wall of a long passage in the grammar school. At first Joshua was content to portray his sitters with the charred end of a stick ; but, on attaining the age of twelve, he felt the responsibility of his years and rose to the dignity of canvas and oil-paint. The canvas was cut from an old boat sail, and the paint was borrowed from a shipwright's shop. The sitter, who sat to the young painter all unconsciously for a preliminary sketch in church, was "a jolly moon-faced tutor and parson" ; and the extraordinary work of art which was finally achieved has survived to our own day.

Five years later the choice of a profession for Joshua pressed to be made. With at least seven clergymen for his sire and grandsire, his uncles, and his maternal grandfather and great-grandfather, there was something to be said for putting him in the way of becoming an archbishop. In the event of success, his charges to the clergy on points of faith and morals



might have made as good reading as his episcopally oracular *Discourses on Art*. But Joshua does not seem to have been offered a clerical career. He was bidden to choose between a painter's life and a druggist's.

To make the dilemma clear, it may be well to explain that while the standing of an apothecary was, in some respects, higher than it is to-day, the standing of a painter was lower. Until Sir Joshua Reynolds himself, by his social brilliancy, raised the status of professional art in England, native painters were of small account. They were fairly numerous because, throughout the century which preceded the invention of photography, there was a large demand for painted portraits. But the plums were nearly all eaten by a very few fashionable artists, who, in order to discharge their commissions, employed "drapery-men," or assistants, who painted in elaborate coats, buttons, ruffles, and swords, leaving the great man to limn the sitter's face only. Clearly understanding the condition of the fine arts in England, young Joshua informed his father that if the choice lay between selling drugs and becoming a "drapery-man," he

would renounce the brush and take up the pestle and mortar. But he had read Richardson's *Treatise on the Theory of Painting*, and had laid to heart the remarkable words :—

I am no prophet nor the son of a prophet; but . . . I will venture to pronounce (as exceedingly probable) that if ever the ancient, great, and beautiful taste in painting revives, it will be in England.

He appears to have been impressed also by Richardson's qualification to the effect that English painters would have to become more "conscious of the dignity of their country and their profession," and that, instead of making way for foreigners, they would have to extend to art "that haughty impatience of subjection and inferiority which seems to be characteristic of our nation." On Richardson's lines, but on no others, Joshua willed to become a painter.

At this time a Devon man, Thomas Hudson, Richardson's son-in-law, was established in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, as one of the English portrait-painters most in vogue. He consented to take Joshua into his house as an apprentice upon receipt of a premium of £120. Clubbing together their savings, and

making a certain draft upon the future, Mr. Reynolds and a married daughter produced the amount, and in October, 1740, the arrangement took effect. For a time everybody was satisfied. Hudson had the £120, together with an enthusiastic fellow-countryman who prepared his canvases, put in backgrounds, and cheerfully performed even the despised work of a "drapery-man." As for Joshua, he was in heaven. He saw Sir Robert Walpole sit to Hudson for his portrait, and in an auction-room he shook hands with Pope. As for his work, he wrote of it to his father: "While I am doing this, I am the happiest creature alive."

What followed is obscure. Two years after entering Hudson's house Reynolds was peremptorily bidden to quit it. On account of a downpour of rain the youth had put off overnight the delivery of a picture. "You have not obeyed my orders, and you shall not stay in my house," thundered Hudson; and there was nothing for the apprentice but to go. According to Reynolds' out-and-out partisans, the affair of the delayed picture was only a shabby pretext, and his master's true reason for showing

him the door was jealousy of the pupil's superior gifts. But Reynolds' own father would not put all the blame on Hudson; and as master and pupil soon became friends again, it is unlikely that deep motives underlay the rupture. Within three years Hudson was forming a habit of asking his junior's opinion on his newly finished works, a fact which surely puts jealousy out of the question.

Home again at quiet Plympton, Joshua speedily found plenty of work as a modestly paid portrait-painter. Returning to London, where the foremost painters accepted him as a friend, he seemed to be fairly coming into his own when his father fell ill. Samuel Reynolds died on Christmas Day, 1746, and until 1749 Joshua dutifully remained at Plymouth Dock with his sisters. In after life he was wont to deplore these three years as wasted, but they brought him at least two visitations of good luck. Hudson, like Richardson, had painted in a hard and dry manner, which it was necessary for Reynolds to unlearn, and he was assisted to unlearn it at Exeter, where his brother Robert was married and settled. Exeter was the home

of the notable artist William Gandy, who had said that "a picture ought to have a richness in texture, as if the colours had been composed of cream or cheese, and the reverse of a hard and husky or dry manner." This dictum and the sight of Gandy's fatly painted pictures awoke in Reynolds his dormant sense of paint. The second stroke of luck seemed greater still. From childhood Reynolds had been acquainted with Lord Edgcumbe, and in 1749 he met at the nobleman's house the young and dashing Commodore Keppel. The Commodore was about to sail for the Mediterranean, and he offered to take Reynolds as far as Leghorn, whence he could make his way cheaply to Florence and Rome.

The sacred name of Rome rang upon the ears of eighteenth-century artists with a resounding grandeur of which our own young painters can have only a faint conception. When Keppel made his proposal Hogarth was the only truly great painter England had produced, and Hogarth's works always impressed Reynolds more as slashing journalism than as immortal classics. There were very many fine canvases

in England from the brushes of domiciled foreigners, including Vandyck, Lely, and Kneller, and there had also been a large importation of first-rank works by far greater masters. But these fine things were in private hands. There was no National Gallery and, of course, no photographs of the treasures in foreign collections. Nowadays a London clerk or shop-girl may see quite a hundred times more of the world's masterpieces than Hogarth ever saw in his life. To take an example, for a knowledge of Michelangelo the stay-at-home was dependent on engravings, most of which were guilty of the muscular exaggeration which so misled poor Blake. Only by means of some sort of a Grand Tour was it possible to know what painting meant: and the climax of a Grand Tour was Rome. Reynolds' friends and relations once more came forward with funds, and on May 11 the "Centurion," with the eager artist on board, weighed anchor for Lisbon.

The "Centurion" took a fortnight to cover the stretch of water over which to-day's mail-boats dash in sixty hours. But Reynolds was privileged to see a city which neither frigate nor

liner can reach any more—the Moorish and mediæval and Manueline city of Lisbon which the earthquake of 1755 all but brought to ruin. After Lisbon the “Centurion” touched at Gibraltar, and, after Gibraltar, at Algiers. In the island of Minorca Reynolds came to sorrow. His horse fell with him over a precipice, and a part of his upper lip had to be cut away. Two months of weakness followed, but at last he entered Rome.

Italy held him for three years. Many Englishmen ran against him in Rome, including the needy Astley,<sup>1</sup> and Richard Wilson the landscape-painter, of whom England is insufficiently proud. With these were mingled certain noble patrons of the arts whose friendship afterwards helped Reynolds on his social way in England. But he had come to Rome to work ; and work he did. To his deep concern, Raphael at first disappointed him ; but he had the modesty and sense to know that the fault was not in Raphael. Michelangelo, however, surpassed his expecta-

<sup>1</sup> Room must be found for one anecdote about this delightful Irishman. During a picnic near Rome, when the fierce heat compelled everybody to doff his coat, the back of Astley's waistcoat was found to have been mended with canvas from one of his pictures representing a waterfall.

tions. Thus, on the Feast of the Assumption, 1750, his notebook says: "I was let into the Capella Sistina in the morning and remained there the whole day, a great part of which I spent in walking up and down in it with great self-importance. Passing through, on my return, the rooms of Raffaelle, they appeared of an inferior order." In this connection a few passages from the Fifth Discourse, which he delivered twenty-two years later, are worth quoting.

Raffaelle's easel-works stand in a lower degree of estimation [than his frescoes]; for though he continually, to the day of his death, embellished his performances more and more with the addition of those lower ornaments which entirely make the merit of some painters, yet he never arrived at such perfection as to make him an object of imitation. He never was able to conquer perfectly that dryness, or even littleness of manner, which he inherited from his master. He never acquired that nicety of taste in colours, that breadth of light and shadow, that art and management of uniting light to light and shadow to shadow so as to make the object rise out of the ground with that plenitude of effect so much admired in the works of Correggio. When he painted in oil, his hand seemed to be so cramped and confined that he not only lost that facility and spirit, but I think even that correctness of form which is so perfect and admir-



able in his fresco-works. . . . I have no desire to degrade Raffaele from the high rank which he deservedly holds : but, by comparing him with himself, he does not appear to me the same man in oil as in fresco. . . .

[Michelangelo] did not possess so many excellences as Raffaele, but those which he had were the highest kind. He considered the art as consisting of little more than what may be attained by sculpture : correctness of form and energy of character. We ought not to expect more than an artist intends in his work. He never attempted those lesser elegances and graces in the art. Vasari says he never painted but one picture in oil and resolved never to paint another, saying that it was an employment only fit for women and children. . . .

It is to Michael Angelo that we owe even the existence of Raffaele : it is to him Raffaele owes the grandeur of his style. . . . Though our judgment must upon the whole decide in favour of Raffaele, yet he never takes such a firm hold and entire possession of the mind as to make us desire nothing else and to feel nothing wanting. The effect of the capital works of Michael Angelo perfectly corresponds to what Bouchardon said he felt from reading Homer ; his whole frame appeared to himself to be enlarged and all nature which surrounded him diminished to atoms.

This compound of truth and error is accounted for by the fact that Reynolds' own talent had a

Raffaelesque complexion which made him yearn towards the huge virility of Michelangelo, just as a dreamy blonde yearns to black hair and flashing dark eyes. This judgment on Rembrandt, which he jotted down in Rome, is worth all he has to say on the Italians :—

Rembrandt's light is extremely brilliant, but it costs too much ; the rest of the picture is sacrificed to this one object.

“It costs too much” might have been Reynolds' verdict on his own sojourn in Rome had he not been single-eyed in his pursuit of art. Catching cold on top of cold in the Vatican he became deaf, thus adding an ear-trumpet to his cut lip. But he did not repine.

By October, 1752, just twelve years after the commencement of his apprenticeship to Hudson, he was back in London, bringing with him a pupil of his own in the person of Giuseppe Marchi, whose portrait, by Reynolds' hand, hangs at Burlington House in the Diploma Gallery. A few months later he established himself at 104 St. Martin's Lane, in the house from which Hogarth had eloped with hand-

some Jane Thornhill. But he soon migrated to 5 Great Newport Street, a stone's-throw further north, where some plaques in the saloon-bar of a modern public-house remind the grooms from Aldridge's of higher things. At Great Newport Street he worked stupendously for seven years without once taking a holiday. Fitly enough it was by means of a portrait of his benefactor Keppel that Reynolds became the rage. In pursuing a French frigate too closely, Keppel had run his own fifty-gun ship the "Maidstone" aground, and Reynolds chose to depict him on a French beach, with a background of wild rocks and storm-clouds, giving the orders which saved most of the "Maidstone's" crew. The portrait, as reporters say, created a sensation; and, with Lord Edgcumbe's backing, Reynolds soon found himself besieged by sitters. Beginning with mere commoners and baronets and their ladies, Reynolds rapidly advanced to the portrayal of Ministers of State, of earls and countesses, of dukes and duchesses (especially the Duchess of Hamilton, the "beautiful Miss Gunning"), and, in 1758, of the Prince of Wales. His surviving pocket-books bear witness to his activity. Thus

in 1757 he noted 184 sitters and one dog. Altogether, he is said to have painted three thousand pictures in the course of his strenuous life : but it must be added that he employed Marchi and other drapery-men to execute the less vital passages of his portraits. "No man," he pleaded in defence of this practice, "ever yet made a fortune with his own hands." Like Constable he had a business-like tariff of charges. At the outset of his operations at Great Newport Street it ran :—

For a Head . . . .	12 guineas
For a Half-length . .	24 guineas
For a Whole-length . .	48 guineas

Curtains, sunset skies, and marble columns or trees were thrown in gratis. These were the same as Hudson's prices. But by 1759 heads had gone up to 20 guineas ; and five years later the counterfeit presentment of your whole body cost you 150 guineas, payable as to one half at the first sitting and as to the balance on delivery.

From all this it will be seen that Reynolds was not exactly a plain liver and high thinker, cultivating the arts on a little porridge. It must be added, however, in his justification that he

never keenly relished portrait-painting, and that he cherished worse delusions than poor Hogarth's respecting his supposed vocation to the Grand Style. Nor was he a miser. He formed a fine collection of Old Masters, not as a commercial speculation but for love of their qualities as paintings. As soon as he could afford it, he housed himself in some state at 47 Leicester Square, spending £1500 on a gallery and on a studio, which can still be seen. His servants wore silver-laced liveries. Apparently by way of advertisement, he maintained also an immodest chariot, painted and gilded, which is said to have been originally a sheriff's coach. Like Hogarth, who, on first setting up a carriage, forgot it so completely that he left it standing at the Mansion House door while he walked home in the rain, Reynolds himself did not take to this magnificent equipage: but it often creaked under the weight of Dr. Johnson as he was borne in it, along with Goldsmith or some other friend, to the painter's little house at Richmond. Reynolds' housekeeper was his sister Frances—the "dearest dear" and "Renny dear" of Dr. Johnson.

By degrees, 47 Leicester Square became the haunt of nearly all the talent of the time. Perhaps his fellow-painters were less acceptable to Reynolds than they themselves thought proper: but, although he became the first President of the Royal Academy, he never favoured an academic absorption in "shop." To use his own phrase, he went with the stream of life. He knew and painted not only princes and ministers and grand dames and proud virgins and high-born children, but also actors, poor scribblers, and even such fair and frail celebrities as Kitty Fisher and Nelly O'Brien. Both Kitty and Nelly he portrayed over and over again. Indeed, it may be said that the *Kitty Fisher with a Dove* and the *Nelly O'Brien* at Hertford House are among the finest of his canvases. "A painter," he said in his Seventh Discourse, "stands in need of more knowledge than is to be picked off his palette." This knowledge he picked up by so assiduous an attendance at dinners, dances, routs, clubs, card-parties, theatrical first-nights, and social functions of every kind that one is left wondering how any time was found for making pictures.



Yet Reynolds hardly ever scamped his work. It must be admitted that he neglected his pupils ; but never his own painting. Whenever he faced a sitter and took up his brush it was with the resolution to achieve the best picture he had ever painted. When somebody asked him how he had produced a certain effect in his *Infant Hercules* he answered, "How can I tell? There are ten pictures underneath this, some better, some worse." Having little more than the "hard and dry" tradition behind him, he was forced to make many experiments with pigments and vehicles. There is a terrible story to the effect that he even scraped his way under the surfaces of pictures by Titian and Rembrandt to see how those giants had worked. Unhappily only the products of Reynolds' first and last phases were painted on sound principles, the works of his middle period having faded so quickly as to justify Horace Walpole's naughty suggestion that Reynolds' sitters, instead of paying him outright, would have done well to settle his accounts by annuities, payable only so long as the portraits lasted. Fortunately, however, good engravings exist of most of Sir Joshua's



now lost or ruined or ghost-pale works. The Print-Room of the British Museum can show twelve portly albums filled with mezzotint and other translations of the paintings, which by their infinite variety and innumerable felicities will astonish the amateur who has only known Reynolds through the meagre and imperfectly representative exhibits in public galleries.

Reynolds never married. Perhaps his daily association with the brightest beauties of his time made him fastidious ; or perhaps their moods and tenses in his studio chair gave him pause. He once told Northcote, the only one of his pupils who did any good, that "lovers had acknowledged to him, after seeing his portraits of their mistresses, that the originals had appeared even still more lovely to them than before by their excellences being so distinctly portrayed." But he was less successful in idealising women on his own account. Gossips knotted his name with poor Angelica Kauffmann's, and it has often been asserted that he was deeply in love with her. The evidence is insufficient. "Angel," in Sir Joshua's notebook, was a natural abbreviation for a busy man. That Angelica and he

painted one another's portraits proves nothing. Reynolds painted his own portrait nearly a hundred times, and he was once painted by Gainsborough, between whom and himself no love was lost. Angelica herself said that Reynolds had made love to her : but, as she confessed that she was "dying for Sir Joshua," she was hardly in a state to distinguish love from gallantry. It is true that when the lady was outrageously cheated into a humiliating marriage Reynolds persistently befriended her ; but did he not just as persistently befriend Johnson and Goldsmith ? To crown all, we have Reynolds' own admission to Johnson that if marriage tempted him, "there was no one he should so much fear as the little Burney." And even the little Burney had entered his head before she entered his heart. We know that while the anonymity of "Evelina" was still unbroken Reynolds sat up all night to finish the book and that he said he would give fifty pounds for a meeting with the author. Yet the little Burney has put it on record that when they came together "he did not make love."

Reynolds, however, was no crusty misogynist. It is true that his nerves, after twenty years, re-

fused to endure any longer the constant presence of "Renny dear," who had a maddening habit of painting portraits for which neither nature nor training had prepared her ; but otherwise he was a ladies' man, with a flow of courtly compliment which marked him as a gentleman of the old school. For example, upon completing the great *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (one version of which hangs in the Dulwich Gallery), he departed from his usual practice and signed the picture. A mantle covers the tragedienne's knee, and it was upon the mantle's fringe that he set his name, saying, "I could not lose the honour this opportunity afforded me of going down to posterity on the hem of your garment."

Reynolds, however, had a big heart as well as a flattering tongue. A Navy clerk, named Mudge, the son of one of Reynolds' old friends in Devon, had set his heart on going home for his sixteenth birthday : but illness forbade the long and tiresome journey. "Never mind," said the artist, "I will send you to your father" ; and he sent Dr. Mudge a painting of the lad peeping from behind a curtain, as though looking on at a family party in which he could not join.

John Courtenay, who was a frequent guest, has left this account of his host's hospitality :—

There was something singular in the style and economy of Sir Joshua's table that contributed to pleasantry and good humour; a coarse, inelegant plenty, without any regard to order and arrangement. A table, prepared for seven or eight, was often compelled to contain fifteen or sixteen. When this pressing difficulty was got over, a deficiency of knives, forks, plates and glasses succeeded. The attendance was in the same style; and it was absolutely necessary to call instantly for beer, bread, or wine, that you might be supplied with them before the first course was over. He was once prevailed on to furnish the table with decanters and glasses at dinner, to save time and prevent the tardy manœuvres of two or three occasional undisciplined domestics. As these accelerating utensils were demolished in the course of service, Sir Joshua could never be persuaded to replace them. But these trifling embarrassments only served to enhance the hilarity and singular pleasure of the entertainment. The wine, cookery and dishes were but little attended to; nor was the flesh or venison ever talked of or recommended. Amidst this convivial animated bustle among the guests, our host sat perfectly composed; always attentive to what was said, never minding what was eat or drank, but left every one at liberty to scramble for himself. Temporal and spiritual peers, physicians, lawyers, actors and musicians composed the

motley group, and played their parts without dissonance or discord. At five o'clock precisely dinner was served whether all the invited guests were arrived or not. Sir Joshua was never so fashionably ill-bred as to wait an hour perhaps for two or three persons of rank or title and put the rest of the company out of humour by this invidious distinction. His friends and intimate acquaintances will ever love his memory and will regret those social hours and the cheerfulness of that irregular, convivial table, which no one has attempted to revive or imitate, or indeed was qualified to supply.

Garrick was often of this goodly fellowship and glorious company. The picture called *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, in which a roguish minx and a haughty maiden contend for the actor's allegiance, is not only one of Reynolds' best designs, but it is also one of his happiest portraits. By the side of it Hogarth's *Garrick as Richard III* looks vulgar. Seeing that one of his latest biographers<sup>1</sup> has argued copiously on the thesis that Reynolds was chilly-hearted, it is worth noting that the portrayal of his nearest friends generally awoke the whole force of his

<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Armstrong, whose book is otherwise invaluable. Having written a big book on Gainsborough before dealing with Reynolds, Sir Walter Armstrong seems to have found a difficulty in treating Gainsborough's great rival quite judiciously.

genius, thus proving the liveliness of his sympathy. One instance is his *Admiral Keppel*; and one still more striking is the National Gallery portrait of Dr. Johnson, which is not simply one of the best Reynoldses but is also one of the best portraits in the world. A cold and hard man could not have called from the warm heart of Johnson the words, "If I should lose you, I should lose almost the only man I call a friend." These two felt one for another an affection which admitted of almost domestic bickering. When Reynolds twitted Johnson with his eleven successive cups of tea, Johnson rejoined, "Sir, I did not count your glasses of wine, why should you number up my cups of tea?" and when Johnson, during his total-abstinence period, rudely cried, "I won't argue any more with you. Sir, you are too far gone," Reynolds did not hesitate to retort, "I should have thought so indeed, Sir, had I made such a speech as you have now done." But the falling-out of these faithful friends was always a renewal of love; and, in Reynolds' company, the Doctor once unbent so far as to kick off his tight shoes and run a race with a lady on a Devonshire lawn.

Both Johnson and Goldsmith were unintelligent in respect of painting. Reynolds, however, was certainly not dull in respect of literature. It is recorded of him by Boswell, who dedicated his great book to Reynolds, that he began to read Johnson's essay on Savage one day when he was leaning with his arm against a chimney-piece, and that "not being able to lay down the book till he had finished it, when he attempted to move he found his arm totally benumbed." And he could write as well as read. In addition to the "Discourses," he left behind him two witty skits on Johnson, showing how the Doctor could maintain two flatly contradictory opinions on two different occasions with equal warmth and force.

At Leicester Square Reynolds reduced his output of portraits and indulged his bent towards imaginative pictures. Very often he combined the two labours and placed real flesh-and-blood sitters in fanciful surroundings. Thus in his *Hope nursing Love*, Hope is a portrait of Miss Morris, a hapless beauty of the day. The Countess Waldegrave became *Dido embracing Cupid*; Lord Vernon found himself in armour;



THE STRAWBERRY GIRL

By

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

*From the Painting in the Wallace Collection*



Mrs. Blake was *Juno receiving the Cestus from Venus*; Lady Sarah Bunbury was shown sacrificing to the Graces; the Duchess of Manchester and her son figured as *Diana disarming Cupid*; and Miss Beauclerk, as Una, reclined beside a lion in a wood. *The Strawberry Girl* (of which there are two copies, one Lord Lansdowne's and the other at Hertford House) was his niece Theophila, or "Offy" Palmer, who succeeded "Renny dear" as the painter's housekeeper.

Those who hold that academies have hindered art more than they have helped it do not think any the better of Reynolds on account of his having been the first P. R. A. But the honour was not of his seeking. Weary of the dissensions which perpetually rent the Society of Artists of Great Britain, he took no open part in the activities which brought its successor, the Royal Academy, into being. Years before he had pleaded for a teaching body of artists, for medals, travelling scholarships, a Diploma Gallery, an annual show of pictures, and for other ideals which are more or less realised at Burlington House; but the actual formation of the Academy, in 1768, was not his work, and

his election as its first president took him by surprise. "His name," said Burke, "seemed to be made for the knightly addition," and it was fitting that the man whom it is so hard to think of as Mr. Reynolds should become Sir Joshua. But neither the presidency of the Academy nor the knighthood pleased him as much as an honour bestowed upon him two years later, when he was elected Mayor of Plympton. Still, all that his hand found to do at the Academy he did with his might, and he would have died a richer and less worried man if the academicians had passed him by. The "Discourses" were only a small part of his presidential work. The jealousies which attend artists in their public relationships were never lacking. When Angelica Kauffmann was made an academician it was said (as, indeed, it is said to-day) that "his Angelica" had not been chosen on her merits. Over an election to the professorship of perspective, friction became so hot that Reynolds once resigned. There were pin-pricks from Gainsborough who ceased to be an exhibitor besides belittling the presidential dignity by painting *The Blue Boy*. When Romney's vogue began

tactless people coined the phrases "Romney faction" and "Reynolds faction." Nor was the oversight of the students all pleasure. To take an instance, Sir Joshua once kindly lent his grand picture of *The Marlborough Family* to a young man named Powell who wished to copy it. By bad luck the bailiffs swooped down upon Powell's quarters and seized all the valuables they could find, including the painted Marlboroughs. It was only by paying Powell's debt in full that the painter could regain his own picture.

As the slightly scandalous Hogarth had painted altar-pieces, and had received as much as five hundred guineas for his work at St. Mary Redcliffe, it was only to be expected that the knighted primate of official art in England should attempt something in the way of ecclesiastical decoration. Accordingly he proposed that the Academy should ask leave to adorn St. Paul's Cathedral with paintings and sculpture. West, Barry, Cipriani, Dance, and Angelica Kauffmann were chosen as the President's helpers. The King, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dean of the cathedral, and the

Lord Mayor heartily supported the scheme. But Dr. Terrick, the Bishop of London, would have none of it. "I would rather close the doors of the cathedral for ever," said this free and enlightened prelate, "than open them to admit Popery." If the episcopal ghost has visited the modern reredos, the cracks which have lately menaced St. Paul's are explained.

Baulked at St. Paul's, Sir Joshua found his opportunity at Oxford. If his *Nativity* window in the west wall of the New College ante-chapel cannot be called a triumphant success, most of the fault must be laid at the glass-man's rather than at the painter's door. Reynolds' idea of making all the light proceed from the Babe was borrowed from Correggio, but he made it his own. In the National Gallery may be seen another of his religious works, the favourite *Heads of Angels*, in which the face of Frances Isabella, daughter of Lord William Gordon, is five times repeated. As for his *Samuel*, this childish form and upturned face became so popular that no Evangelical home was complete without the engraving or the cast which recalled it. But it is by his *Virgin and Child*, past



THE DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE AND HER DAUGHTER

By

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

*From the *Painting at Chatsworth**

which the twentieth-century visitor is hurried by the butler at Petworth, that Reynolds ranks highest as a religious painter.

These exercises in stained-glass and religious painting were spread over the years 1778-87; and when he finished the *Virgin and Child* Reynolds was a man of sixty-four. Yet he was still advancing in his art. The grand *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse* and the delicious *Duchess of Devonshire and her Daughter* were both painted after he had passed three-score years. So was the virile portrait of Lord Heathfield; and the picture of Sheridan, one of the most masterly of all his achievements, was wrought when the artist was nearer seventy than sixty. Meanwhile, he went on drawing material profit from his labour and enjoying his life. For his *Macbeth* (a design for Boydell's Shakespeare) he demanded and received a thousand guineas. We read of his staying a fortnight at Belvoir with the Duke and Duchess of Rutland. Even the slight stroke of paralysis which tried to smite him in 1782 was powerless against "the invulnerable man," as Johnson called him; for Bath so swiftly cured him that in the year

following he painted *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse*. Twelve months later, despite his Whiggery, he became "King's Painter," and a year afterwards the Empress of Russia, who had already rewarded the first volume of his "Discourses on Art" with a diamond-encrusted golden snuff-box, sent him fifteen hundred guineas for his *Infant Hercules*. His world wagged well, and he was grateful. "He appeared to me," said Malone, his executor, "the happiest man I have ever known."

But there is an end appointed to all things and to all men. On Monday, July 13, 1789, while he was working at a young lady's portrait, the sight of his left eye suddenly became darkened. He knew what it meant and laid down his brushes. To Sheridan he wrote: "The race is over, whether it is won or lost." He painted no more. A little cleaning or mending of his pictures was all his cunning hand could do when the guiding light was gone. But his brain and his tongue were left to him, and on December 10, 1790, he delivered his fifteenth and last Discourse at the Royal Academy. It was a hymn to his first love Michelangelo. Not

without a touch of resentment against the fate which had compelled him to desert Michelangelo's high mountain-passes for the pretty lanes and trim lawns of fashionable portrait-painting, he solemnly charged the students to have recourse to Michelangelo, so that they might be "nursed in the lap of grandeur." Here is the noble end of the whole Discourse:—

It will not, I hope, be thought presumptuous in me to appear in the train, I cannot say of his imitators, but of his admirers. I have taken another course, one more suited to my abilities and to the taste of the times in which I live. Yet, however unequal I feel to that attempt, were I now to begin the world again, I would tread in the steps of that great master : to kiss the hem of his garment, to catch the slightest of his perfections, would be glory and distinction enough for an ambitious man.

I feel a self-congratulation in knowing myself capable of such sensations as he intended to excite. I reflect, not without vanity, that these discourses bear testimony of my admiration of that truly divine man ; and I should desire that the last words which I should pronounce in this Academy, and from this place, might be the name of—Michael Angelo.

He ceased. Himself and every one of his hearers knew that the last words Reynolds would



ever pronounce in that Academy from that place were indeed "Michael Angelo." He descended from the chair. Edmund Burke stepped forward, and, gripping the aged hand, repeated Milton's lines :—

The angel ended, and in Adam's ear  
So charming left his voice, that he awhile  
Thought him still speaking, still stood fix'd to hear.

But after his long, sunny day, Reynolds' short eventide was chill and dark. Johnson, Goldsmith, Garrick—nearly all his bosom friends were dead. He busied himself sadly with Johnson's monument, only to meet with a mean rebuff from his fellow-academicians. Even the little Burney could not wholly rouse him from his deepening despondency. He would pace a room silently, a pet canary on his finger; but one morning the canary flew through the open window, and, in spite of the old man's hours of coaxing, did not return. The invulnerable man was beaten at last, and he waited for death. "Nothing," wrote Burke, "can equal the tranquillity with which he views his end. He congratulates himself on it as a happy conclusion to a happy life." On February 23, 1792, he passed

away in peace. The mourning for him was wide and deep. His remains lay for some days in state at the Royal Academy, and were finally laid in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral, in the place which has since come to be known as Painters' Corner.

## GAINSBOROUGH

(1727-1788)

THERE were brave men before Agamemnon ; but one does not need to go back to the misty days of Dædalus and Icarus in order to find a forerunner, or a foreflyer, of Mr. Henry Farman and Mr. Wilbur Wright. One fine morning, in the eighteenth century, a little crowd gathered round a summer-house near Sudbury, in Suffolk, to see their local celebrity "Scheming Jack" mount into the empyrean. Unhappily the human eagle's copper wings were unfaithful to their trust, and "Scheming Jack" dropped like a stone into the nearest ditch.

"Scheming Jack's" full name was John Gainsborough, and he was the elder brother of that Thomas Gainsborough, the airiest and most bird-like of English painters, who learned to fly in a better sense than John had dreamed of. Thomas Gainsborough never became a painter

of supernaturalism, sojourning in mystical clouds; yet he was never an earth-bound realist. Like the winged things of his own leafy Suffolk, he flashed hither and thither over plodders' heads, but he always kept himself within sight and smell of the warm fields and the scented gardens.

The Gainsboroughs were a clever family. "Scheming Jack" invented a self-rocking cradle, an annoying cuckoo that cuckooed all the year round, and a wheel (probably a turbine) which revolved in a bucket of still water. The Government once rewarded him for an ingenious chronometer of his making; but his life was ineffective, and his seven daughters had often to face an empty larder in order that there should be no dearth of brass and tin for his experiments. Of another brother, Humphrey, it is said that he was the true inventor of a steam-condenser which was coolly pirated by James Watt. He also made one of the first fire-proof safes. A third brother, Robert, displayed his energy by "eloping with his first wife."

Both the father and the mother of these hopeful children were out of the worn groove of middle-class Suffolk life. One of them

(nobody can decide which) was a Nonconformist, Sudbury having been a stronghold of Independency from Commonwealth times. As the husband was skilful with the sword, and was reputed to have been once nearly caught in the act of smuggling a keg of brandy, he cannot have been a Roundhead of a very orthodox type. He was buried in Sudbury churchyard; but his wife, although her brother was certainly a clergyman of the Established Church, was buried under the shadow of the chapel. Their son Humphrey—he of the fire-proof safe and the pirated condenser—became an Independent pastor, although the ministry of the Establishment was open to him; and, on the whole, the household seems to have been rather more “chapel” than “church.” The point would not be worth much discussion had not a twentieth-century writer on Gainsborough made it the text of a long pro-Puritan pleading headed “Puritanism and Art.” Probably the most signal service rendered by Puritanism in the moulding of the artist Gainsborough was to impel him towards sensuous beauty by way of reaction from Puritanism’s non-human austerity.

Its more clear effect upon him was to import an element of truculence into his naturally generous and kindly character. Perhaps a great deal of his lamentable estrangement from Reynolds is to be explained by that "I-won't-be-patronised" attitude through which Independents try to live up to their name, even in cases where no patronage is intended by their well-wishers.

Mrs. Gainsborough's pretty talent for painting flowers descended to "Scheming Jack" as well as to Thomas. Jack, indeed, advanced so far in Art as to receive a commission for the new signboard of the Bull Inn. For this masterpiece the landlord offered twenty shillings. "Make it thirty," said the painter, "and I will fasten the bull down with a golden chain worth ten shillings more." The patron refused, and the sign was painted, but after the first night of rain the bull had completely disappeared from the board. "You should have let me fasten him down," said Scheming Jack; and it turned out that he had done the work in distemper.

Thomas was sent to school at his parson-uncle's, where, like Hogarth and Reynolds and many another artist before and since their days,

he practised drawing all over his books. On holidays it was his delight to set off with paper and pencil into the woods and lanes, and when holidays did not come of their own accord he would plead with his parents for notes of excuse. After a time his father put down a decisive foot and insisted that the lad should stick to his lessons. The sequel was stupefying. Thomas used his skill as a copyist to fabricate a note in the paternal handwriting, which ran "Give Tom a holiday." So well did the trick succeed that Tom, in a spare hour, is said to have prepared an advance supply of similar "Give-Tom-a-holiday" notes, which he hid in a brass warming-pan. When a cold snap came unexpectedly and the pan was opened the father cried out in horror, "Tom will be hanged!" As he lived in days when men often swung for stealing a sheep from a field or picking a pocket of five shillings, his fears were substantial. But when he saw some of the drawings which the little forger had made during his trauancies, he added, "Tom will be a genius."

Gainsborough's corner of Suffolk was inferior

to Constable's ; but it was nevertheless a fine work-ground for an artist who, of all the glorious line of English landscape-painters, was the first to study nature in the open air. Sudbury itself—to use the slang of water-colourists—was a “bitty” place. Fulcher, Gainsborough's biographer, says with mid-Victorian scorn: “The dilapidated and ancient buildings which . . . encumbered and disfigured the streets of his native town were, in the eyes of the Painter, positive beauties. . . . Its then unpaved thoroughfares were, at irregular intervals, encroached upon by uncouth porches ornamented with carvings still more uncouth, antediluvian monsters and zoology-defying griffins, whose antiquity was their only recommendation.” But, to compensate Tom for the absence of factory-chimneys, telephone-wires, and sky-signs, his father's orchard was overlooked by the picturesque ruins of the palace built by Simon of Sudbury, the unfortunate Archbishop of Canterbury who was beheaded by Wat Tyler's mob. As well as the ruins there was the River Stour flowing, as Fulcher neatly puts it, in Hogarth's line of beauty to the sea.



The orchard was the scene of Tom's first triumph as a portrait-painter. One day at sunrise he was busily sketching an old tree when the slanting light of the sun showed him the eager face of a local ne'er-do-well who was about to climb the fence and steal the pears. At sight of the sketcher the thief took to his heels; but Tom straightway returned to the house and made so speaking a likeness of the runaway that old Gainsborough at once recognised him and commanded his presence. At first the fellow denied his guilt; but when he was confronted with his portrait he made a full confession. The proud artist thereupon shaped a board like a man's head and shoulders, and painted "Tom Peartree" upon it in so life-like a manner that people who saw it stuck upon the fence mistook it for a living man. This curiosity still exists, and was shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885.

Thomas, as his father had perceived, was a genius; but even a genius must learn his trade. Accordingly he was sent, in 1741, to London, where he worked first under Hubert Gravelot, and afterwards under Hayman. Hayman was a

pupil of Brown,<sup>1</sup> whose master had been Sir James Thornhill, Hogarth's father-in-law, and he was able to teach a young man from the country many things less edifying than draughtsmanship. Hayman became a colleague of Hogarth in decorating the Vauxhall Gardens supper-boxes; but he found the Gardens slow in comparison with such delights as prize-fighting, bull-baiting, cock-fighting, and getting ingloriously drunk. In spite of such influences Gainsborough remained the most refined of painters, so far as his canvases were concerned; but it was probably Hayman who taught him the wretched habit of low cursing and swearing which defiled too much of his correspondence and conversation. After three years of Hayman, Gainsborough took rooms in Hatton Garden, and tried to make his own living. He asked three

<sup>1</sup> Dallaway, in his addenda to Walpole's "Anecdotes of Painting," says: "Highmore relates an anecdote of Brown, when engaged with Thornhill [in decorating the cupola of St. Paul's]. They worked together upon a scaffold, which was an open one. Thornhill had just completed the head of the apostle, and was retiring backwards in order to survey the effect, heedless of the imminent danger. As he had just reached the edge, Brown, not having time to warn him, snatched up a pencil [brush] full of colour and dashed it upon the face. Thornhill, enraged, ran hastily forward, exclaiming, 'Good God! What have you done?' 'I have only saved your life,' was the satisfactory reply."

and five guineas for portraits, but was glad enough to let the dealers have his drawings for as little as seven shillings apiece. In his day, as in our own, Hatton Garden was the headquarters of Italian plaster-cast vendors, and tradition has it that copies of a marvellous old horse of Gainsborough's modelling were sold in the Garden shops. But neither paint nor plaster paid the youth's expenses; and, in 1745, he returned to the peace and freshness of Suffolk.

He was eighteen years old and, according to Fulcher, "handsome, of a fair complexion, regular features, tall, well-proportioned. His forehead, though not high, was broad and strongly marked, his nose Roman, his mouth and eye denoting humour and refinement; the general expression of his face thoughtful, though not altogether pleasant. The most casual observer must have seen that much lay there; one gifted with greater insight would have said also that something was wanting, though few would have affirmed what."

Mr. Cobbold, of Ipswich, possesses a large landscape executed by Gainsborough at this time. It is an insincere but engrossing work.

Imitating those Dutchmen who recoiled from the flatness of Netherland scenery into wild exaggerations of waterfalls and crags and ravines and the other features of an *accidenté* country, Gainsborough has crowded his canvas with the most incongruous objects. High-gabled Dutch houses are perched on Italian rocks, while English sheep and cattle and rustics fill the foreground. One looks at it with some pleasure, but mainly with thankfulness that the youth in due time returned to himself and to nature. "The Suffolk ploughmen," we are told, "often saw him in the early morning, sketch-book in hand, brushing with hasty steps the dew away."

With romantic inaccuracy, Allan Cunningham, in his "Lives of the British Painters" (1829), thus narrates the luck which befell Gainsborough in his nineteenth year:—

It happened in one of his pictorial excursions among the woods of Suffolk that he sat down to make a sketch of some fine trees, with sheep reposing below and wood-doves roosting above, when a young woman entered unexpectedly upon the scene, and was at once admitted into the landscape and the feelings of the artist. The name of this young lady was Margaret

Burr ; she was of Scotch extraction and in her sixteenth year, and to the charms of good sense and good looks was added a clear annuity of two hundred pounds. These are matters which no writer of romance could overlook, and were accordingly felt by a young and ardent and susceptible man. Nor must I omit to add that country rumour conferred other attractions. She was said to be the natural daughter of one of our exiled princes, nor was she, when a wife and a mother, desirous of having this circumstance forgotten. On one occasion of household festivity, when her husband was high in fame, she vindicated some little ostentation in her dress by whispering to her niece, "For you know, my love, I am a prince's daughter."

According to the much more reliable Fulcher, a Sudbury man, Miss Burr's brother was a commercial traveller, in the crape-and-shroud trade, for Gainsborough's father. In Fulcher's time the tradition of the girl's extraordinary beauty persisted in Sudbury. Fulcher adds : "That a beautiful girl should wish to have her portrait painted by her brother's young friend naturally followed as cause and effect. The sittings were numerous and protracted, but the likeness was at last finished. . . . The young lady expressed her warm admiration of the

painter's skill, and in doing so gave him the gentlest possible hint that perhaps in time he might become the possessor of the original."

For the last of the foregoing sentences Fulcher has been taken to task. It is true that 1746 was not a leap year; yet his story may have something in it. To ask, rather than to be asked, in marriage is one of the prerogatives of royal maids where commoners are concerned; and, which is more to the point, a boy of nineteen with no income would need a little encouragement before proposing to take possession of a lady with two hundred a year. That the £200 existed is beyond a doubt. It was paid mysteriously, through solicitors, all the forty-two years of Gainsborough's married life. The most plausible theory of its origin is that Miss Burr was a daughter of the youth Wriothesley, who, had he lived, would have been seventh Duke of Bedford. This Bedford connection was distinctly asserted in 1818 by Mr. Thomas Green, of Ipswich; and, at the show of Gainsborough's pictures at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885, the resemblance of Mrs. Gainsborough to John, seventh Duke of Bed-

ford, impressed many beholders of their portraits. It is also known that Gainsborough wrote to this Duke of Bedford with a familiarity which seems to imply some kind of relationship.

After the wedding the young pair dwelt for a little while with the bridegroom's parents. But they soon set up housekeeping on their own account; first in Sudbury, and a few months later in Brook Street, Ipswich. Although the annual rent of the Brook Street house was only six pounds, Gainsborough's commissions did not seem likely to defray it. There was a gleam of hope one day when a rich squire in the neighbourhood sent for the young artist. When he arrived at the house, thinking that he was to depict its beauties, Gainsborough had to listen to a diffuse account of the mansion's broken panes and perishing fences, until he must have begun to think that his patron was like Oliver Cromwell, who insisted that a wart should have due prominence in his portrait. Finally the squire came to the point by asking Gainsborough's estimate for sprucing-up the whole place. He had taken the painter to be a painter and glazier!

In 1747, two years before Reynolds' meeting with Commodore Keppel, Gainsborough met the man who was to be his first considerable patron. But while Keppel was a generous and strong man, Philip Thicknesse was quarrelsome and spiteful. "Tom Peartree," who had been transported to Ipswich by his creator, effected the introduction. Thicknesse was Lieutenant-Governor of Landguard Fort. Walking one day with the local editor, he "perceived a melancholy-faced countryman with his arms locked together, leaning over the garden wall." To quote Thicknesse's own words :—

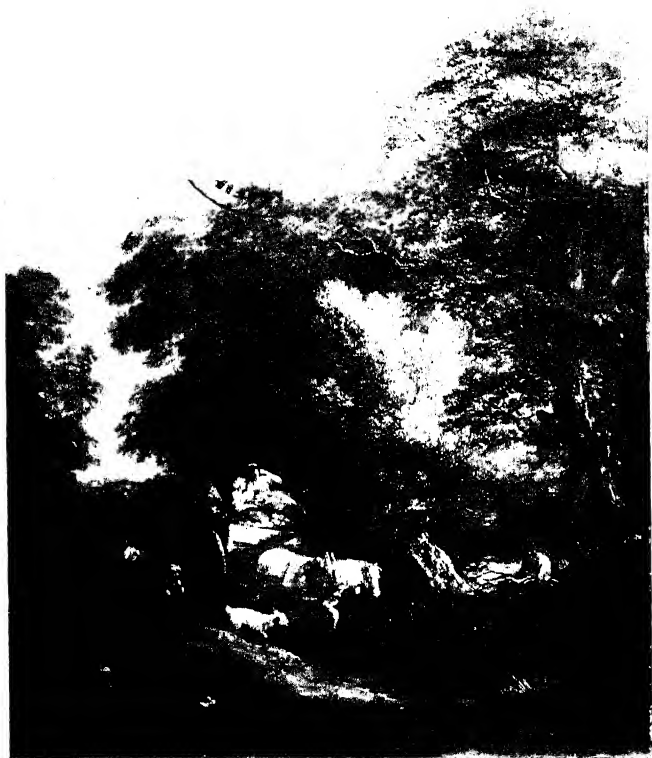
I pointed him out to the printer, who was a very ingenious man, and he with great gravity of face, said the man had been there all day, and that he pitied him, believing he was either mad or miserable. I then stepped forward with an intention to speak to the madman, and did not perceive till I was close up that it was a wooden man painted upon a shaped board.

Nowadays, when the chief concern of many biographers is to differ from their predecessors, Thicknesse is being held up as an unjustly abused person. Thicknesse, however, has settled the matter by his own letters and



memoirs. In his will he directed that his right arm should be cut off and sent to his son "to remind him of his duty to God, seeing that he had failed in his duty to his father." His quarrelsomeness once cost him a fine of £300. "He was perpetually imagining insult, and would sniff injury from afar. Contention was essential to his existence." In his patronage of Gainsborough, whom he claimed to have discovered, he wore the airs of a Mæcenas. Yet it cannot be denied that whatever Thicknesse's spirit and motives may have been, he played as influential a part in Gainsborough's life as Keppel played in Reynolds'. It was Thicknesse who first caused a Gainsborough picture to be engraved. This was the breezy *Harwich, with Landguard Fort*, the original of which soon succumbed to the damp of a wall on which Thicknesse hung it.

The years were slipping away. Gainsborough's thirtieth birthday came and went, and he was still practically unknown outside his Suffolk circle. People called him in to portray their faces or their houses at small fees, and the resultant canvases were generally in the tight and



THE MARKET-CART

By

THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

correct manner which the patrons expected. In a few cases the painter broke loose, as in his *Lady and Gentleman in a Landscape*. Occasionally an almost French grace appears in these early pictures ; but, broadly speaking, Gainsborough of Ipswich would have been forgotten a hundred years ago had he not grown up into Gainsborough of Bath.

Bath just then was almost at its best. Beau Nash had been forced to give up his preposterous coach and circus horses ; but, as Beau Nash had always done the town a little more harm than good, Bath increased while the Beau decreased. Again, owing to the international unrest, not many English people were visiting spas abroad. Accordingly, Bath was filled with belles and dandies and consequential people who thought little more of going to the portrait-painter than a modern actress thinks of going to the photographer. In short, Bath was the place where, with luck and industry, a painter might look for money and reputation.

There seems to be truth in Thicknesse's boast that it was he who drew Gainsborough from frugal and sleepy Ipswich to the city of

extravagance and frivolity. Fulcher says that the move was made in 1760—the year when Sir Joshua Reynolds migrated to Leicester Square, giving a grand ball and setting up a gilt chariot to advertise the fact. It is more likely that Gainsborough, after a trial trip in 1758, took the decisive step in 1759. Thus England gained her greatest painter in the year of her losing Handel. For it cannot be denied that Bath did as much for Gainsborough as Rome had done for Reynolds. In the country houses of Somerset immortal pictures were to be seen, and the Suffolk man's eyes were speedily opened to the wonders of Van Dyck. Van Dyck could do many things which were for ever out of Gainsborough's range: but the brightest beam in his glory as a portrait-painter is that he inspired a disciple who became even greater than his master.

Gainsborough, or Thicknesse, or both of them together, knew that Bath was not to be conquered by hole-and-corner methods. They boldly engaged rooms in the newly built Circus, in a house which has lately been distinguished by a mural tablet. When Mrs. Gainsborough,

fresh from her six-pound house in Ipswich, learned the rent she fell into a panic. "Fifty pounds a year!" she cried. "Mr. Gainsborough, are you going to throw yourself into gaol?" But Thicknesse explained the position and (so he says) gave undertakings which calmed the lady down. Further, he suggested that he should graciously allow his own countenance to be painted forthwith "as a decoy-duck" to tempt other witty and handsome sojourners in Bath to Gainsborough's studio. A portrait of Thicknesse was begun: but, so far as its use as an advertisement was concerned, Gainsborough had no occasion to finish it. From the outset sitters flocked in, probably more on account of Gainsborough's exploits during his trial visit of the previous season than of Thicknesse's social connections. The price for a head was advanced almost immediately from five guineas to eight; with the usual result of whetting the sitters' appetites still more keenly. Later on, Gainsborough usually asked and received fifty guineas for a half-length, and for a whole-length a hundred.

Gainsborough's life falls into four almost

equal divisions of about fifteen years each. He was in his fifteenth year when he left Sudbury to learn his craft in London. He was thirty-one when he began the siege of Bath. At Bath he remained just fifteen years; and, he had been a little more than fourteen years in London when he was laid in the churchyard at Kew. Of these four terms the years at Bath were not the least happy. Although Gainsborough would have been like a fish out of water in the deliberately clever company of Reynolds and Johnson, he had a rustic's delight in the town. The theatre was his joy, and many actors were among his friends. He painted Garrick, who, happily for posterity, loved sitting to as many artists of eminence as possible. General Palmer, the manager of the Bath theatre, occasionally gave Gainsborough a box, and received in return two or three pictures which would now be worth a whole year's takings. As for music, he could play passably on several instruments: and, as one might expect from the subtlety of his painting, he hated the pianoforte and harpsichord and indeed all those keyboard instruments which, while calling many splendid compositions

into existence, have been injurious to music as a whole. He knew the Linleys, the leaders of musical Bath, and he rose to the top of his talent in painting that beautiful and unhappy Miss Linley who became the wife of Sheridan. Another musician friend was Jackson of Exeter, whose "Te Deum in F" is still too often sung. Gainsborough, indeed, was sometimes music-mad. It was over a rare old viol-di-gamba that he quarrelled with Thicknesse.

Happy in his friends and pleasures Gainsborough was also happy in his work. Like everybody else he grumbled sometimes, saying, "I'm a landscape painter, and yet they will come to me for portraits." But the proof that he did not find his daily work a bore is found in the work itself. The mere putting of the pigments on the canvas is done with a lightness and sureness of touch which has never been equalled by any rival, either in England or out of it. In nearly all his pictures he saw what he wanted to do and did it. It is said that he had a painter's trick or two. For instance, after a sitter had gone Gainsborough would close the shutters, excluding all daylight except so much

as could struggle through one round hole, thus assuring himself that his central pictorial idea was being clearly expressed. Some say that he confined this patch of light to the sitter's face while he was actually painting; also that he would work with brushes six feet long so that he could stand still, with the canvas and the sitter at exactly equal distances from him. There are many of his finest works to which these legends can hardly apply, but, whatever his processes, the fact remains that Gainsborough's things of beauty were joys in the making as well as joys for ever. What Reynolds once said of Velasquez is true of Gainsborough: "What we are all attempting to do with great labour, he does at once."

Gainsborough had his limitations: but, as he was himself aware of them, they caused him hardly any unhappiness. Ideal and historical painting were beyond him. He needed the inspiration of a living and breathing man or woman before his eyes. Almost his sole lapse was when he tried, at Garrick's suggestion, to paint an ideal portrait of Shakespeare. He set to work with the sound intention of "taking the form from the



Bard's pictures and statues, just enough to preserve his likeness past the doubt of all blockheads at first sight," and of "supplying a soul from his works." But he was swift to detect his own failure and wrote to Garrick :—

I have been several days rubbing in and rubbing out my design of Shakespeare, and hang me if I think I shall let it go or let you see it at last. I was willing, like an ass as I am, to expose myself a little out of the simple portrait way, and had a notion of showing where that inimitable poet had his ideas from, by an immediate ray darting down upon his eye turned up for that purpose ; but, confound it, I can make nothing of my ideas, there has been such a fall of rain from the same quarter. You shall not see it, for I will cut it before you can come. . . . Shakespeare's bust is a silly smiling thing, and I have not sense enough to make him more sensible in the picture, and so I tell ye, you shall not see it. I must make a plain picture of him, standing erect, and give it an old look, as if it had been painted at the time he lived ; and there we shall fling 'em.

Shakespeare was soon abandoned. *Diana and Actæon*, now at Windsor Castle, was left unfinished ; and the National Gallery *Musidora*, which is said to be Gainsborough's only other attempt at a classical picture, was probably not

a classical picture at all but a portrait of Emma Lyon, afterwards Lady Hamilton, of whom something must be said in the chapter on Romney. Similarly in his landscapes Gainsborough was not successful when he depicted ruins and mountains "all made up out of his own head." His genius consisted in his facing real human beings or real Nature with exquisite sensibility towards their pictorial qualities and in the supreme facility with which he recorded what he saw. To painters his brushwork is one of the wonders of the world; to laymen his colour is a banquet of deliciousness. Yet this is not the whole of his greatness. Gainsborough's intuition was as effective as Reynolds' intellect; and such pictures as the *Perdita* (Mrs. Robinson) in the Wallace Collection, and *Mrs. Richard Sheridan* in the possession of Lord Rothschild, show how deeply he could enter into the most sacred places of human hearts. In short his blithely executed, deliciously coloured, sympathetically conceived portraits fulfil Milton's definition of poetry—a definition which is true of all the arts. Gainsborough's masterpieces are "Simple, sensuous, passionate."

Events at last conspired to drag Gainsborough



away from Bath. He had been elected a Royal Academician. Reynolds was receiving a smaller number of sitters, and Romney was becoming the painter of the hour. Friction with Thicknesse warmed up the always hot-tempered artist to such a point that Bath became intolerable. The Thicknesse version is that Gainsborough offered a hundred guineas for Mrs. Thicknesse's viol-di-gamba with which he was in love, and that Mr. and Mrs. Thicknesse gave him their treasure without money and without price on the understanding that he would let them have Thicknesse's portrait. Gainsborough, they say, kept the instrument, but not his promise; and, beyond roughing-in the beginnings of Thicknesse's form with a dog at his side, he did nothing. After many days Mrs. Thicknesse caught sight of the unfinished canvas, and was so shocked at her half-painted spouse's uncanny appearance that she burst out crying and begged that the thing might be hidden at once in the attic. To the attic it went, and at the same time Gainsborough returned the viol-di-gamba. The tiff was apparently ended by Gainsborough's admitting his fault and offering to finish the

portrait in his very best manner. But when nine months passed without another brushful of paint reaching its surface Mrs. Thicknesse broke out once more and wrote to Gainsborough, asking him to "take his brush and first rub out the countenance of the warmest and truest friend he ever had, and so done, then blot him for ever from his memory."

The Gainsborough version is different. It hints that the painter had secretly paid the lady her hundred guineas when her husband was not looking—a defence which is far worse than the indictment. This version adds that Thicknesse, in his intolerable boastings, had given it out in Bath that Gainsborough's children, before their lucky father fell in with so noble and discerning a patron, used to run ragged in the streets of Ipswich. The truth seems to be that everybody was more or less in the wrong. Mrs. Gainsborough and Thicknesse disliked one another. The two men had hasty tempers, and the two women had tongues. One or other of the families had to leave Bath, and it was the Gainsboroughs who went.

Schomberg House, Pall Mall, where they

chose their London dwelling, is strong in memories of painters. The building was divided into three parts, the central one of which was occupied by Astley,<sup>1</sup> and afterwards by that far better artist, Richard Cosway. One wing became Gainsborough's, while the rest of the house, from 1781 onwards, housed the quack doctor Graham, with his mud-baths and his beautiful Emma Lyon. Perhaps from magnanimity, perhaps from fussiness, Thicknesse sought to prepare Gainsborough's way by commendatory letters to lords. But his services were hardly needed. Gainsborough's reputation was well established.

Reynolds duly called at Schomberg House, although Gainsborough had ceased sending pictures to the Academy; but Gainsborough did not return the visit. His neglect may have been mere slackness, but it is more probable that a rather weak affectation of manly independence was at the root of it. Besides this, there was a complicated difference between the two artists. Reynolds, although a Whig in

<sup>1</sup> See page 65. Having married money, "Beau" Astley no longer needed to mend his waistcoats with painted waterfalls.

politics, posed as an academic in art, while Gainsborough, a free-lance in art, was a Tory in politics. The Court, which was cold to Reynolds, took up Gainsborough effusively. "Doubtless portraiture is a tantalising art—no pleasing your sitters, hey?" the King said one day. "All wanting to be Venuses and Adonises, hey? Well, Mr. Gainsborough, since you have taken to portraiture I suppose every one wants your landscapes, hey? Is it not so?" After nine years' residence in London, Gainsborough was able to exhibit no less than fifteen heads of the King and Queen and their family. Later on he brought several princesses into his magnificent picture *The Mall, St. James's Park*, of which Horace Walpole<sup>1</sup> wrote: "You would suppose it would be stiff and formal, with the straight rows of trees and people sitting on benches. It is all in motion and in a flutter like a lady's fan."

Along with many others, Fulcher believed that the wonderful *Blue Boy*, now in the collection of the Duke of Westminster, was intended as a

<sup>1</sup> Not Northcote, as stated by Hazlitt.

slap at Reynolds. In his Eighth Discourse Reynolds said :—

It ought, in my opinion, to be indispensably observed that the masses of light in a picture be always of a warm, mellow colour—yellow, red, or a yellowish white; and that the blue, the grey, or the green colours be kept almost entirely out of these masses, and be used only to support and set off these warm colours; and for this purpose a small proportion of cold colours will be sufficient. Let this conduct be reversed; let the light be cold, and the surrounding colours warm, as we often see in the works of the Roman and Florentine painters, and it will be out of the power of Art, even in the hands of Rubens or Titian, to make a picture splendid or harmonious.

The popular tradition fondly imagines that Gainsborough's brush demolished Reynolds' dogma by building up a "splendid and harmonious" picture in which the cold colour blue supplies the central interest. But the millions of people who have looked at *The Blue Boy* while he has hung at the Franco-British Exhibition have had their chance of seeing that the Boy is not so very blue after all. As Leslie, echoing Sir Thomas Lawrence, says in his "Handbook for Young Painters" :—

In this picture the difficulty is rather ably combated than vanquished. Indeed, it is not even fairly com-



bated, for Gainsborough has so mellowed and broken the blue with the other tints that it is no longer the pure bleak colour Sir Joshua meant; and, after all, though the picture is a very fine one, it cannot be doubted that a warmer tint would have made it still more agreeable to the eye.

The latest searchers, however, lean to the opinion that *The Blue Boy* was painted nine years before Reynolds publicly pronounced his dictum. It has even been suggested that, instead of Gainsborough answering Reynolds' lecture, Reynolds was answering Gainsborough's picture.

Similar obscurity hangs over his so-called *Duchess of Devonshire*, the work by which the artist is best known to the non-artistic public. The fact that this canvas was sold in 1876 for £10,605, that it was stolen from Agnews' a day or two after they bought it, and, above all, that it represents her supposed Grace in an enormous Gainsborough or "picture" hat, endeared the "Lost Duchess" to millions of people who would walk past the divine *Morning Walk* (*Squire Hallett and his Wife*) with hardly a moment's pause. Probably the "Lost Duchess" was not a Duchess at all. Worse still, she is not supremely well painted; and, now that she



THE MORNING WALK (SQUIRE HALLETT AND HIS WIFE)

By

THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

*From the Original Sketch*

come to his house, his table, and the good-will of some part of his family, for he seldom had his own way but when he was roused to exert a painful authority for it, and then he flew into irregularities and sometimes into excess ; for, when he was once heated, either by passion or wine, he continued unable and unwilling also to do business at home, and at those times squandered away, fifty times over, the money which an extra joint of meat or a few bottles of port would have cost to have entertained his friends at home. I mention this because, had it not been for such pitiful doings, he would still have been in all human probability the delight of his friends and the admiration of the world for years to come. He had so utter a disregard for money that *somebody* smuggled up in a few years at Bath five hundred pounds.

Those who have sat to Mr. Gainsborough know that he stood, not sat, at his palette, and consequently, of late years at least, five or six hours' work every morning tired him exceedingly, and then, when he went into the Park for a little fresh air or up in the city upon business, if he took a hackney coach to ease his tired limbs back again, he was obliged to be set down in St. James's Square, or out of sight of his own windows, for fear of another set down not so convenient either to his head or his heels as riding out twelve pennyworth of coach-hire after having earned fifty guineas previously thereto.

I have more than once been set down by him in that manner, even when I was going to dine with

him, and have more than once been told *by him why we were so set down*. If, therefore, I have told this tale so severely, let it be remembered I have lost a friend whom I sincerely loved, and . . . *Let the stricken deer go weep*.

Although what women call cattishness is writ large over this pitiable passage, Thicknesse's modern apologists are taking it very seriously. Yet it is surely easy to read between the lines. As the maker, or abettor, of so much mischief in Bath, Thicknesse would hardly be welcome to Mrs. Gainsborough on the new hearth in London. As for the suggestion that she had "made a purse" in Bath, it was both her right and her duty to do so. During the two-and-forty years of her married life, £8400 came in from her annuity, and probably six times as much more from her husband's painting; yet Gainsborough left hardly any money behind him. At Bath she had to busy herself with what their father called "the dusty work of finding husbands" for his two daughters, who were nearer thirty than twenty when they were taken, still unmarried, to London. As for the nature of the domestic atmosphere, Fulcher

has preserved an account of it different from Thicknesse's. He says :—

Whenever Gainsborough spoke crossly to his wife, a remarkably sweet-tempered woman, he would write a note of repentance, sign it with the name of his favourite dog Fox, and address it to his Margaret's pet spaniel Tristram. Fox would take the note in his mouth and duly deliver it to Tristram. Margaret would then answer, "My own dear Fox, you are always loving and good, and I am a naughty little female ever to worry you as I often do, so we will kiss and say no more about it."

Tradition further declares that Gainsborough's delight was to spend long evenings at his wife's side, making drawing after drawing.

One often meets men whose hearts absence does not make fond. To friends who are within an arm's length they are embarrassingly generous, while to other friends who have drifted into the next parish they are negligent or hypercritical or downright quarrelsome. There was occasionally something of this about Gainsborough. He would distribute drawings and even paintings right and left on the smallest pretext. That he should have bestowed paintings on the Bath carrier who, out of pure love

of art, had declined to take payment for conveying his works to London, was intelligible; but he also gave away drawings to acquaintances merely to shut their mouths while music was being played. Yet he could be a miser of his time and talent in cases where he should have been lavish. He himself begged Reynolds to sit to him in 1782; but, like Thicknesse's, the portrait was left alone after a single sitting.

In his dealings with the Royal Academy "My dear Fox" was a very naughty Dog. Indeed, he was much less like the sleek and meek Pomeranian in his *Perdita* than like the upper of his *Two Fighting Dogs with a Shepherd-Boy*. Although he was an Academician, he would attend no meetings and would perform hardly any duties. More than once he withheld his pictures from the annual show. In 1784 he finally broke from his brethren. Finding them unwilling to waive in his favour a regulation concerning the hanging of full-length and three-quarter-length portraits, he discharged at their heads the following ultimatum:—

Mr. Gainsborough presents his compliments to the gentlemen appointed to hang the pictures at the Royal

Academy, and begs leave to *hint* to them that if the Royal Family, which he has sent for this Exhibition (*being smaller than three-quarters*) are hung above the line with full-lengths, he never more, whilst he breathes, will send another picture to the Exhibition. This he swears by God.

As he had offered to accept inferior positions for his other pictures, and as it was truly vital to his *Royal Family* that it should be hung only breast-high, Gainsborough had a good case for concession. But he wrote a bad letter. In his days, the ratio of bad work in the Academy exhibition to the good work excluded from it had not become such as to justify any artist in flaunting his contempt for the Academicians. There was too loud a ring of "the dissidence of dissent" in Gainsborough's whoop of defiance. With such a document before it, the Academy could not give way; and Gainsborough, as bad as his word, never sent in another picture.

The Royal Academy had no monopoly of their unruly member's disrespect. A story of the superb *Mrs. Siddons*, now in the National Gallery, makes a piquant contrast with that other story, told in the preceding chapter, of Sir Joshua and the hem

of the divine Sarah's garment. Gainsborough found the lady's features hard to draw and burst out, "D—— your nose, Madam, there's no end to it!" To another sitter, a conceited alderman who pleaded for a clear portrayal of a pretty dimple on his chin, Gainsborough said, "Oh, d—— your dimple! I will paint neither it nor you." Again, when he overheard an ignoble nobleman vulgarly demanding if "that fellow Gainsborough" had finished his likeness, he slashed a brushful of paint across the canvas, and said (at a dead loss of £105), "Where is that fellow now?"

His tantrums did not sour the painter below the surface. The secret betrothal of his daughter Mary to an oboe player, followed by an unhappy marriage and a separation, worried him; but he extracted much pleasure from a tour of the English Lakes and from summers spent at Richmond. Living at the rate of a thousand a year, he was, nevertheless, open-handed towards distress; and altogether he was doing a great deal with his life.

At the trial of Warren Hastings, in February, 1788, Gainsborough was served with the summons to go before a juster Judge than any in West-



minster Hall. An intense cold affected a spot on his neck, about the size of a shilling; and he soon learned that it was the print of Death's own finger. The cancer, as his doctors called it, gave him half a year to set his affairs in order. He met his fate like a brave man.

About the end of July, when the end was near, the unfinished portrait of Reynolds made a mute appeal, and Gainsborough was filled with a desire for reconciliation with his great brother, if not for absolution from the supreme pontiff of English art. With halting pen and failing brain he penned this pathetic letter:—

DEAR SIR JOSHUA,—I am just to write what I fear you will not read, after lying in a dying state six months, the extreme affection which I am informed by a friend which Sir Joshua has expressed induces me to beg a last favour which is to come over under my roof and look at my things. My Woodman you never saw. What I ask now is not disagreeable to your feeling, that I may have the honour to speak to you. I can from a sincere Heart say that I always admired and sincerely loved Sir Joshua Reynolds. THOS. GAINSBOROUGH.

“My Woodman” was *The Woodman in a Storm*, a picture which afterwards perished in a fire at

Exton Park. Reynolds came. Into the sick-room were brought some of the dying man's favourite landscapes and the two painters discussed their contents. "If any little jealousies had subsisted between us," says Reynolds nobly in his Fourteenth Discourse, "they were forgotten in those moments of sincerity." At last the moment of parting came; and, as Sir Joshua bent over his pillow, it is said that Gainsborough murmured, "We are all going to Heaven—and Van Dyck is of the company."

## ROMNEY

(1734-1802)

“**I**N art,” said Jean François Millet, “you must give your skin.” He would have been nearer to historical truth had he said that the artist must be prepared to give his skin if necessary. To take two examples from the preceding chapters, Reynolds and Gainsborough slept softly and warmly, and, if they had been so minded, could have worn purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day. Of poor George Romney, however, his skin was required. He was born with a leaden spoon in his mouth ; and when luck came his way it was too late to bring him any solid happiness.

Overlooking Morecambe Bay, with the mountains sheering up in the north and the sea filling all the west, “Honest John” Romney lived as a farmer and carpenter. He could make almost anything, from a finely carved fiddle to an im-

proved cart-wheel, from a pump to a new kind of shell-fish manure. Unlike those honest folk whose honesty is merely the best policy, he was generous as well as just, often letting off his debtors with a leniency which his creditors did not imitate. He and his wife, like the Hogarths, were of good yeoman or "statesman" blood. Their third son, George, was born the day after Christmas Day, 1734.

Upon William and James, the two elder sons, was poured out all their parents could afford in the way of a liberal education. Little George, however, had to be content with a village school where the fees for tuition amounted to only five shillings a quarter. Making slow progress he was soon withdrawn, with the result that he never learned to spell. But a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting* came his way and taught him things better than orthography. Indeed, in a provincial way and on a very small scale, he resembled a little Leonardo, inasmuch as he busied himself with architecture, music, engineering, and half a dozen other crafts as well as painting. He further emulated the Renaissance by trifling with

alchemy and dreaming of the philosopher's stone.

In 1755, a year which Reynolds spent in painting 120 sitters, the Reynolds of Kendal was one Christopher Steele, who is said to have studied in Paris under the excellent French artist Carlo Vanloo. To impress his clients, Steele affected such dandified and Frenchified manners that he was agreeably nicknamed "the Count." His lordship had room for an apprentice: and in March, 1755, young George Romney was bound to him for four years. The premium was twenty pounds. Apparently the money did not last Steele long: for within a year he was planning an elopement with an heiress—one of his pupils—to Gretna Green. The apprentice's first duties were not confined to art. He was called upon to take a busy part in arranging the Count's flight. And it was this sorry business which originated the tragedy of Romney's own life.

While the wedded fugitives were honeymooning on the safe side of the Border, Romney was lying ill at his Kendal lodgings. Tradition says that his sickness was directly due to the excitement of his rôle in the elopement: but this does

not affect the sequel. The landlady's daughter, Mary Abbott, was both a devoted nurse and a likeable young woman ; and the pair soon fell in love.

At the beginning of the autumn, the "Count" came back into England. Word was sent to Romney that his master required his presence in York, where he intended to settle down and paint portraits. The lovers took counsel, and decided to make sure of one another by getting married before their separation took place. Accordingly, on October 14, 1756, the knot was tied which was to cut its cruel way down into two hearts. A few days later the bridegroom set out for York.

According to "the poet Hayley," the patron of his later life and his first biographer, Romney repented of this hasty marriage as soon as he had leisure. He perceived that he had disabled himself, and that he had thrown away the mobility which counts for so much when one takes the field in Art. Mary Abbott was of his own station in life, but she seems to have possessed no more than her natural share of brains and temperament. Yet she was as great

as Romney, as the sequel will show. During his exile in York she gave the first proof of her lifelong faithfulness and self-sacrifice by supplying him with pocket-money, half a guinea at a time, which she sent hidden in the sealing-wax of her letters.

In judging Romney as a man and a husband, one or two things must be weighed in his defence. At the age of fifteen he had lain under the influence of a certain John Williamson, a watchmaker-chemist, who had spent his time and money on a process for transmuting base metals into gold. Williamson firmly believed that his wife had cheated him of triumph. For months his furnace had been kept ablaze, and at last the hour of the supreme test had drawn near. But on this crucial afternoon guests appeared and nothing would induce Mrs. Williamson to excuse her husband from doing the honours. Suddenly, while everybody was at the tea-table, the furnace exploded. So bitter was the alchemist's resentment that he could no longer bear to remain in the same house with the author of his disaster, and a complete separation followed. No doubt this tale, so often and

so bitterly poured into his ear, would recur to Romney when his own conjugal problem became acute. Again, "Count" Steele was an unprincipled Bohemian, who regarded women as alternately tempting and tiresome creatures, to be taken up or dropped at an artist's good pleasure, and some seeds of this bad doctrine would lodge in the apprentice's mind.

To his credit let it be said that Romney tried for five years to make the best of married life. Steele, of whose poor Countess we can discover nothing more, was soon in Romney's debt to the extent of ten pounds, all borrowed in small sums from the little stock of money which poor Mary's hard-earned half-guineas had gone to swell. Under the indentures, the master was bound to provide his apprentice with board and lodging, as well as instruction in painting. The advantages were therefore nearly all on Steele's side when, in 1757, Romney induced him to cancel their bargain, the master keeping both the original premium and the ten pounds while the apprentice merely regained his freedom.

At the age of twenty-two, with a wife and a baby son dependent upon him, Romney set up



in Kendal as a portrait-painter on his own account. In return for all the sacrifices his parents and his bride had made, he had received only a few odds and ends of training from Steele. At first he was glad to discharge the humblest commissions. The earliest of them is said to have been a hand holding a letter, which was used as a window-sign at the Kendal post office. But a gentle family of the neighbourhood, the Stricklands of Sizergh, soon set him to worthier work. At Sizergh there were two pictures by Lely and Rigaud,<sup>1</sup> which he was allowed to copy. One thing led on to another. The Stricklands' friends and their friends' friends called in the young painter's services, and, at two guineas for a head and six guineas for a whole length, he found enough work to keep him alive.

But a born artist does not paint to live ; he lives to paint. Romney felt that Rome alone could raise him to his full height ; and although so far-away a goal seemed out of reach, he bent

<sup>1</sup> As Rigaud's talent is often misstated in England, the reader's attention may be drawn to his very fine *Lulli and the Musicians of the French Court*, a good reproduction of which will be found in "Great Musicians," a companion volume to the present work.

his mind to Paris, or, at the very least, London. To waste his life in manufacturing portraits for patrons who preferred the journeyman style would be intolerable. But there was no "Centurion" in Morecambe Bay and no Keppel to bid him go aboard. He knew that he must help himself. Occasionally he would refresh his own mind and delight others' ears by playing on his home-made fiddle, but nearly all his waking hours were passed in hard efforts to lay shilling on shilling and guinea on guinea. In addition to portraits, he executed a few original compositions and some oil-copies, or adaptations, of prints after old masters. As buyers did not come forward, he disposed of eight originals and twelve copies by means of a public lottery. All the eighty-two tickets were sold at half a guinea each, and by 1762 Romney had hoarded up a hundred guineas.

It was plain that the possession of a hundred guineas would not justify Romney in removing his whole family to London, where they might easily starve before he could obtain a single commission. Mrs. Romney therefore consented to a division of forces. The hoard was equally

divided ; and while the wife and her two children remained to hold the little fort at Kendal, the husband mounted a horse and rode off to storm London. Probably they parted in the belief that Romney would either soon fail, and return to the North, or succeed and summon the others to join him in the South. But the separation lasted thirty-seven years. To be precise, Romney left his wife in 1762, and did not revisit her until 1765. After a second short stay in 1767, he did not see her again for thirty years ; and when he made his final journey northwards in 1799 he was a broken invalid, with only a few pitiable months to live. So far as this sorry business can be explained, the explanation will be found in the after-course of the story.

Having looked up his old master Steele on the way, Romney reached London towards the end of March, 1762. A supposed highwayman had given him a fright at one stage of his journey ; but he and his guineas arrived at the Castle Inn safe and sound. From the inn he removed first to lodgings in Dove Court, near the Mansion House, and afterwards to Bearbinder Lane. Many and great as were his faults,



MRS. ROBINSON ("PERDITA")

By

GEORGE ROMNEY

*From the Painting in the Wallace Collection.*

it is hard to repress a wave of sympathy for this lonely, poor, ill-educated man, without a patron or a letter of introduction, cutting up his beloved *Death of Rizzio* because the canvas was too big to take to his second lodging. While he was rejoiced to get three guineas for a three-quarter-length portrait, Reynolds, with the rich memories of his Italian tour to inspire him, was already a considerable personage, with his coach and his liveried servants and his great house in Leicester Fields. At the same time, Gainsborough, only seven years Romney's senior, could hardly keep pace with the noble clients who thronged round him at Bath.

The Society of Arts was offering premiums for historical pictures ; and, in 1763, a blaze of delight filled the solitary's heart at the news that his *Death of Wolfe* had won fifty guineas—the second prize. But it was too good to be true. The pedants upraised their voices. This newcomer's *Death of Wolfe*, they insisted, must be disqualified. How could the gallant Wolfe's glorious end be made the theme of a truly historical painting, when it had occurred too recently for any historian to record it? Again,

how could a painting be historical in which the soldiers wore contemporary uniforms instead of Roman tunics? The committee, ashamed of their ignorance, reversed their own decision, and awarded the second prize to another artist. A consolation-prize, grandly called a "premium extraordinary," of twenty-five guineas, was voted to Romney; and, later on, a banker paid a further twenty-five guineas for the picture, and sent it to Calcutta. Better still, the gossip to which the affair gave rise brought Romney into notice. Heads went up to five guineas, and he was able to lay the foundations of a second modest pile of guineas.

But the guineas were not being saved to hire either a north-going horse for the artist, or a south-coming coach for his family. By this time, Mrs. Romney had left Kendal, and had been installed in the house of her husband's father. The painter's mind was full of Paris, where so many fine things were to be seen. In September, 1764, just eight autumns after Mary Abbott and he had fallen in love, he reached the French capital. For six weeks he roamed the galleries. According to Hayley, the pictures that affected

him most were the scenes from the life of Marie de Médicis by Rubens. When one stands before those hotly controverted masterpieces, in the beautiful new room of the Louvre where they are housed to-day, it is only by an effort that one can recall Romney's reposeful and pretty pictures. Probably his drawing towards the immense exuberance of Rubens was like Reynolds' worship of Michelangelo—an affinity of opposites.

Returning to London with an enlarged mind, he invited the town to take him a little more seriously. In a more imposing lodging, in Gray's Inn, he painted a few legal luminaries, and also competed once more for a Society of Arts premium. This time he not only won a prize of fifty guineas, but was allowed to keep it. With this sum of money he paid his long-deferred visit to his family. His little girl was dead, and his only son was old enough to travel. But Romney returned alone to London. After his second visit, in 1767, he went back to the metropolis and removed to a house called the "Golden Head," in Great Newport Street, where it would have been easy to accommodate his wife

and son ; but he left them in the North. Italy was calling him.

Richard Cumberland, who had held high office in Ireland but had sunk to a poor two hundred a year, became Romney's mentor about this time. "When I first knew Romney," he says in his Memoirs, "he was poorly lodged in Newport Street, and painted for the small price of eight guineas for a three-quarter length. I sat to him, and was the first who encouraged him to advance his terms by paying him ten guineas for his performance." He goes on to explain that poor pay and poor lodgings did not exhaust the list of Romney's sorrows. The worst was that his sitters were mostly inartistic burgesses who preferred wooden renderings of vacuous faces to true portrait-painting. One day, when Cumberland kindly brought Garrick to the Newport Street studio, Romney was caught fulfilling a commission from a Mr. Leigh. Bulking over a large space, paterfamilias and materfamilias with their six children were displaying "a contented abstinence from all expression of thought or action." As the frequent sitter and intimate friend of Hogarth



and Reynolds and Gainsborough and other noted artists, Garrick could hardly be blamed for accounting himself something of an art critic ; and having "fixed his lynx's eyes" upon the unfortunate group, he said to Romney, "Upon my word, Sir, this is a very well-ordered family, and that is a very bright well-rubbed mahogany table at which that motherly good lady is sitting, and this worthy gentleman in the scarlet waistcoat is doubtless an excellent subject to the State (I mean if all those are his children), but not for your art, Mr. Romney, if you mean to pursue it with that success which I hope will attend you."

Romney meekly agreed, and at once turned the picture with its eight blank faces to the wall. Cumberland's own portrait was next shown. "It is very well," said Garrick, "that is very like my friend, and that blue coat with a red cape is very like the one he has on ; but you must give him something to do, put a pen in his hand, a paper on his table, and make him a poet. If you can once set him down to his writing, who knows but in time he may write something in your praise?"

Taking this excellent advice, Romney gave his next sitters "something to do." In his *Sir George and Lady Warren and their Daughter*, the little girl was shown fondling a pet bird. Everybody who saw this work fell in love with it, and Romney began to be in request. But he sent no pictures to the Royal Academy—then holding its first annual show. At the Chartered Society's exhibition, in 1770, he arrested visitors by two figures called *Mirth* and *Melancholy*, illustrating Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. A year later he showed his *Mrs. Yates as the Tragic Muse*, and five other portraits. But his method was still cold and unfree, and he knew far better than Garrick or Cumberland or any other counsellor that he had much to unlearn and learn. By 1772, after ten years' hard labour in London, he was making a thousand a year; and on March 20, 1773, the eleventh anniversary of his first entering the capital, he quitted it for Rome.

After so many years of sacrifice and of ardent desire there was a danger of disappointment; but it is pleasant to find that Rome satisfied Romney. How much he loved and worshipped

it we can learn from the letter he wrote from Venice to Carter, a fellow-student. Speaking of his last view of the city from the top of Mount Viterbo, he said :—

I looked with an eager eye to discover that divine place. It was enveloped in a bright vapour, as if the rays of Apollo shone there with greater lustre than at any other spot upon the terrestrial globe. My mind visited every place, and thought of everything that had given it pleasure; and I continued some time in that state, with a thousand tender sensations playing about my heart, till I was almost lost in sorrow. Think, oh, think, my dear Carter, where you are, and do not let the sweets of that divine place escape from you; do not leave a stone unturned that is classical; do not leave a form unsought that is beautiful; not even a line of the great Michael Angelo.

Romney was well treated in “that divine place.” He held aloof from the other English artists in Rome; but leave to copy the most famous works was given him. In addition to innumerable memoranda, he made an elaborate full-scale copy of the groups in the lower part of Raphael’s *Transfiguration*. At Florence he was less favoured; but Bologna honoured him

with an offer of the Presidency of the Academy of Painting. In Venice he broke his rule of aloofness to the extent of consorting with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's brilliant and worthless son Edward. On the homeward journey he passed again through France, of which he had written on the outward journey :—

The taste for painting, and the art itself are at the lowest ebb ; simplicity they call vulgar . . . everything must have the air of a dancer or actor, the colour of a painted beauty, and the dress recommended by the barber, tailor and mantua-maker. . . . The French are a people that have no idea of simplicity and are totally devoid of character and feeling. Nothing can be a greater proof of their degeneracy of taste than the indifference with which they treat everything produced by those great masters who have held the first rank for so many ages, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Titian, etc. They say their works are too dark, gloomy, and heavy. With them everything must be light, false, fantastical, and full of flutter and extravagance—like themselves.

One would like to be sure that Romney was thinking of Boucher or of Greuze rather than of Watteau or of Chardin.

It ought to be explained that the letter just quoted, as well as the epistle to Carter at Rome,

have probably been touched up by an editor. In Messrs. Humphrey Ward's and W. Roberts' *catalogue raisonné* of Romney's works there is a transcript, *verbatim et literatim*, of another letter which more correctly represents his attainments as a scholar. Addressing his father from Rome on June 20, 1773, Romney wrote :—

Take care of Molly and John and keep him at a good lattin school and desire him to endeavour to retain the butys and knowledge the lattin authors are filled with as well as the language.

“Molly” was the patient Mary. John, of course, was her boy, afterwards the Rev. John Romney and the painter's second biographer. Neither mother nor son appears to have felt bitter at the husband and father for taking himself off to the Pope's Rome, although six years had passed since he had shown them his face. Indeed, the Reverend John was a little indignant at the suggestion that George Romney had behaved very much amiss. Dealing in the biography with the theory that Romney broke up his home with an inward resolve never to reconstitute it, the Reverend John says: “As a proof that he entertained no such intention, he

came twice afterwards to see his wife." Twice in eight-and-thirty years !

Society has a short memory ; and when Romney re-entered London after two years and three months of travel he found the town had forgotten him. He had spent all the money he had, as well as fifty pounds which he hadn't. To this debt of £50 was added another £50 owing by one of his brothers. Bold tactics were necessary, and he did not shrink from using them. A large house in Cavendish Square stood vacant. The rent was a hundred guineas a year. Romney took possession of it on Christmas Day, 1775 ; and, although he was practically penniless, he magnified himself still more largely in the eyes of the public by refusing sitters until he had built an addition to the house in the shape of a studio. His policy succeeded.

Cumberland generously sought to help the good work with two bad "Odes to Romney," of which Doctor Johnson was gracious enough to say that "they would have been thought as good as Odes commonly are if Cumberland had not put his name to them." A few months later

the "poet" Hayley took Romney up. Other patrons followed, and his future was made. According to the diaries which Messrs. Ward and Roberts have so carefully printed, Romney booked no less than 9000 sittings in the twenty years which followed. Had he not been one of the most tremendous workers ever known, either in Art or out of it, he would surely have felt like Opie, who spoke of planting a cannon at his front door to keep sitters away.

No artist can win immortality without deserving it. But to become the vogue in his own day a painter owes as much to luck as to merit. Luck visited Romney through Thurlow, the Lord Chancellor. When sitting to Reynolds, Thurlow had discoursed upon the story of Orpheus and Eurydice as a fine subject for pictures, and had been much chagrined at Reynolds' inattention. Romney was much more appreciative; and it was this, rather than any purely artistic preference on Thurlow's part, which prompted his public utterance: "The town is divided between Reynolds and Romney; I belong to the Romney faction." Unhappily Reynolds for once lost his self-command and

began to allude to his rival as "the man in Cavendish Square." Romney could not wholly forget that Reynolds had had a voice in the halving of his fifty guineas for *The Death of Wolfe*; and all these wretched matters combined to keep the two men apart. Romney persisted in ignoring the Royal Academy to the end.

It was soon after Thurlow had coined his deplorable phrase that Romney encountered the amazing woman whose name is for ever bound up with his own. Emma Lyon, afterwards Lady Hamilton, lives for us in the work of Romney; and, for most people, Romney exists merely as the portrayer of Lady Hamilton. Emma, or Amy, Lyon was born at Great Neston, on the Cheshire side of the Dee's estuary, in 1763 or 1765, which means that she was a babe unborn when Romney first set out for London. She was of even humbler birth than Romney himself; and when her father, a blacksmith, died, her mother crossed the sands o' Dee to her native Welsh village of Hawarden. At fourteen Emma was in service as a nursemaid; at sixteen she was in London as a lady's-maid; and before her eighteenth year was completed, a man's base





LADY HAMILTON

By

GEORGE ROMNEY

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

selfishness launched her on her extraordinary career. With her character gone, she was glad to find employment with the quack Graham, whose monstrous Temple of Health was installed at Schomberg House, Pall Mall, the mansion partly occupied by Gainsborough. Graham was the man who held receptions, seated up to his shoulders in a mud-bath. In an adjoining bath sat a handsome lady; and, as the powdered coiffures of the pair were very elaborate, they suggested to a wit two cauliflowers growing in mud. The Temple of Health contained "the Celestial Bed," which one paid half a guinea to see. But its chief attraction was "the rosy Goddess of Health," a classically robed beauty whose charms proved "the all-blessing effects of virtue, temperance, regularity, simplicity, and moderation." The Goddess was Emma Lyon. She may or may not have been Gainsborough's Musidora; but it appears certain that Romney was among the artists who came to draw her lovely person.

Romney was no saint; but unhappily for Emma, the votaries who streamed to her Temple included rakes compared with whom the wife-

deserting Romney was an angel of light. One of these, Sir Harry Featherstonhaugh, cajoled her away from the quack, but soon tired of his plaything, and left her most cruelly in the lurch. From Hawarden, where she arrived without a guinea, she wrote to Charles Greville, who had befriended her before, this desperate letter:—

I am almost distracted. I have never heard from Sir H. What shall I dow? Good God! What shall I dow? I have wrote seven letters and no answer. I can't come to town caus I am out of money. I have not a farthing to bless myself with, and I think my friends looks cooly on me. O Grevell, what shall I dow? What shall I dow?

It will be seen that poor Emma was not complete as a speller; but in this respect she was kept in countenance by Romney and Nelson, the two great men whose fate was bound up with her own. On receiving her appeal, Greville sent her money and told her to come to London. While she was living quietly under his protection, with only twenty pounds a year for pin-money, the chief of her few delights and distractions was to be painted by Romney.

And the painter was as keen as the sitter. He painted her in a hundred attitudes and characters. He painted her as a Bacchante, as Circe, as Cassandra, as Euphrosyne, as Diana, as Iphigenia, as Ariadne, as Calypso, as a Pythian Priestess, as Nature, as Sensibility, as Lady Macbeth. He seated her beside a whirring wheel and painted her as a Spinstress. He posed her against a church organ and painted her as St. Cecilia—a holy virgin whom Emma cannot be said to have closely resembled. In unconscious prophecy, he painted her as Joan of Arc; for did not Nelson say years afterwards that the Battle of the Nile was Emma's doing? In addition to her grace and beauty, she was gifted with a supreme instinct as a plastic actress and a model. All agree that this divine lady, as Romney called her, "had exquisite taste, and such expressive power as could furnish to an historical painter an inspiring model for his various characters, either delicate or sublime. . . . Romney delighted in observing the wonderful command she possessed over her eloquent features, and through the surprising vicissitudes of her destiny she ever took a generous pride

in serving him as a model ; her peculiar force and variations of feeling, countenance, and gesture, inspirited and ennobled the productions of his art."

Certain writers, who view the lives of artists from a literary standpoint, and for whom the mere phrase "an artists' model" always arouses literary associations, have wished to suggest that Romney and Emma were much more to one another than artistic colleagues and good friends. But the evidence establishes no such opinion. In this matter both parties seem to have been loyal to their friends. That they delighted in one another's society was natural. Not only did their affinity for one another as painter and model become clearer at every new sitting, but there were many little things to cement their friendship. Both the middle-aged man and the rosy girl had only swum to such comfort and peace as they enjoyed through a sea of troubles. Each of them was in a delicate conjugal position. Both alike had been bred and born and educated far below the social levels on which they had to pass a great deal of their time. Together they could unbend, sympathise, understand.



LADY HAMILTON SPINNING

By

GEORGE ROMNEY

*After the Painting in the possession of the Right Hon. Viscount Iveagh, K.P.*

Getting into debt and needing to repair his fortunes by a wealthy marriage, Greville, towards the end of 1785, struck a sordid bargain. Sir William Hamilton, his ambassador-uncle, was home from Naples on the look out for a second wife. It suited the nephew better that Sir William should not marry again; and he thought to thwart the plan by making over Emma to his uncle, who was already a worshipper of her beauty. On his side, the uncle was to pay off the nephew's debts. Emma herself was not consulted. Indeed, she was cheated with a lying tale. Sir William was fifty-five—four years senior to Romney—and the woman of twenty-two was told that he would take her to Italy, with her mother, so that she might study music under the foremost Neapolitan masters. Greville was to follow. On these terms, Emma agreed to go. But as soon as she had sailed Greville shut her out of his life. Her letters, full of passionate pleading, he ignored. She was willing, she said, to go from London to Scotland on foot if only she might see him again. Very soon the true position glimmered upon her mind, and she wrote: "Remember you will

never be loved by anybody like your affectionate and sincere Emma. Pray, for God's sake, wright to me and come to me, for Sir William shall not be anything to me but your friend." When Greville at last broke silence with the brutal and shameful truth, her righteous wrath and pride blazed out. "If I was with you, I would murder you and myself both" was her splendid answer. But she was penniless and more than a thousand miles from home. Sir William held nearly all the cards ; and he won.

Romney, deprived of the lively and sunny presence which had brightened so many of his dull days, gave himself tremendously to work. His pupil Robinson, of Windermere, thus records the painter's mode of life :—

He generally rose between seven and eight o'clock and walked to Gray's Inn to breakfast ; on his return, while his servant was dressing his hair, he was employed in drawing, with which he amused himself till ten o'clock, the hour at which he had always a sitter appointed. His number of sitters was three, four, and sometimes five. At noon he took broth or coffee, and dined at four in the most simple manner. After dinner he walked into the country, and always had his sketch-book, in which new thoughts were



slightly marked. On his return home he had again recourse to his portfolio, and amused himself with the design he had worked on in the morning till twelve o'clock, when he retired to rest. This was his custom without any variation, except when it rained, while I remained with him.

Should a sitter fail to appear at the time appointed, Romney would spend the time thus gained in further drawing.

By toiling early and late Romney's income mounted up to three or four thousand a year. But still he failed to make a home for his family in London. His state of mind can be understood, although it cannot be approved. By this time his humbly bred wife was a woman of fifty, and it was too late for her to be shorn of provincialism and trimmed to the fashion of the town. That Romney had become a fastidious judge of elegance and beauty is plain from such pictures as his portraits of the Ramus Sisters—two of the most entrancing portraits in the world. The divine Emma's flower-like beauty and flame-like spirit filled the nearer spaces in his memory. Worst of all, he had concealed from many friends the fact that he was

a married man, and he lacked the moral courage to unsay his falsehoods.

Romney's failure to pay an annual visit to the North becomes doubly ugly when it is remembered that for twenty-three years in succession he spent his autumn at Eartham, Hayley's place in Sussex. Yet even here his champions can make a partial apology. The autumns at Eartham were not delicious days of dreary idleness. They were as crowded with work as the winters and springs among London bricks and mortar. Released from the drudgery of portrait-painting, Romney would plunge with feverish energy into historical and imaginative composition. The scribbling and book-skimming Hayley was for ever finding "subjects." To quote one example out of a thousand, Romney was induced to illustrate Woltemad and his good horse rescuing a shipful of drowning sailors.<sup>1</sup> Nor was Hayley the only prompter. Anna Seward, the "Swan of Lichfield," was preening her feathers at Eartham and was

<sup>1</sup> An engraving of this design will be found in Hayley's "Life of Romney." It is curious that several twentieth-century writers say that the engraver was Caroline Watson. It was by no less an artist than William Blake, who has made it as much a Blake as a Romney.

belying her name by breaking out into song early and often. Upon the Hayley hearth the host was called Pindar, Miss Seward Sappho, and Romney Raphael. Here is Allan Cunningham's account of an Eartham day :—

When the party assembled at breakfast the ordinary greetings were Sappho, Pindar, and Raphael; they asked for bread and butter in quotations, and "still their speech was song." They then separated for some hours. Poetasters, male and female, retired big with undelivered verses, and Romney proceeded to sketch from the lines of Hayley. When the hour appointed for taking the air came, the painter went softly to the door of the poetess, opened it gently, and, if he found her "with looks all staring from Parnassian dreams," he shut it and retreated. If, on the contrary, she was unemployed, he said "Come, Muse," and she answered "Coming, Raphael" !

To use the serviceable slang of the moment, this is the sort of thing to make one feel tired.

Romney was tired, very tired, in 1791. With infinite pains he had completed his pretentious *Tempest*, so good in parts, so bad as a whole. But life seemed stale. A run to Paris, by way of Brighton and Dieppe, beguiled but did not restore him. His fine new painting-room in the riding-

school at Eartham was ready; but he lacked the impulse to set about those grand historical works of which he had been dreaming. In the early spring he was equal to the production of his two well-known designs *The Infant Shakespeare*; but such deep dejection and acute hypochondria followed that he seriously spoke of abandoning a profession for which he was no longer fitted. Suddenly the clouds were rent asunder. One June day Emma, in Turkish dress, came into his studio and threw herself into his arms. Her great news was that Sir William, who was at her side as she spoke, had brought her to England to make her Lady Hamilton.

Three months were to pass before the wedding-day; and his old model promised her leisure to Romney. Straightway he was himself again. He wrote off to Hayley: "At present, and the greatest part of the summer, I shall be engaged in painting pictures from the divine lady. I cannot give her any other epithet, for I think her superior to all womankind. . . . She asked me if you would not write my life. I told her you had begun it; then she said she hoped you would have much to



LADY HAMILTON AS A BACCHANTE

By

GEORGE ROMNEY

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

say of her in the life, as she prided herself upon being my model." A week or two later he wrote: "I dedicate my time to this charming lady." He also announced that one of the pictures he had begun was Emma as a Magdalen, a *gaucherie* which nobody seems to have resented. Early in August he was in despair at some imaginary coldness on the divine lady's part; but by the end of the month he was able to say to Hayley: "My mind had suffered so very much that my health was affected, and I was afraid I should not have power to have painted any more from her; but since she has assumed her former kindness, my health and spirits are quite recovered." To their old good-comradeship was added the zest of exchanging recollections of beloved Italy.

The marriage took place on September 6, and shortly afterwards Romney beheld the divine lady for the last time. In England the Queen had refused to receive her, naturally regarding the marriage as a little late in the day; but, in Paris, Marie Antoinette was cordial, and, in Naples, the Queen was almost affectionate. Before Christmas she displayed her bad grammar

and good heart in the following letter to Romney:—

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have the pleasure to inform you we arrived safe at Naples. I have been received with open arms by all the Neapolitans of both sexes, and by all the foreigners of every distinction. I have been presented to the Queen of Naples by her own desire. She as shewn me all sorts of kind and affectionate attentions. In short, I am the happiest woman in the world. Sir William is fonder of me every day, and I hope he will have no cause to repent what he has done ; for I feel so grateful to him that I think I shall never be able to make amends for his goodness to me. But why do I tell you this? you know me enough. You was the first dear friend I opened my heart to. You ought to know me, for you have seen and discoursed with me in my poorer days. You have known me in poverty and prosperity, and I had no occasion to have lived for years in poverty and distress if I had not felt something of virtue in my mind. Oh, my dear Friend ! for a time I own through distress, virtue was vanquished. But my sense of virtue was not overcome. How grateful now then do I feel to my dear, dear husband that as restored peace to my mind, that as given me honer, rank, and what is more, innocence and happiness. Rejoice with me, my dear Sir, my friend, my more than father. Believe me, I am still that Emma you knew me. If I could forget for a moment what I was I ought to suffer. Command me

in anything I can do for you here. Believe me, I shall have a real pleasure. Come to Naples and I will be your model—anything to induce you to come that I may have an opportunity to shew my gratitude to you. Take care of your health for all our sakes. How does the pictures go on? Has the Prince been to you? Write to me. I am interested in all that concerns you. God bless you, my dear Friend. I spoke to Lady Sutherland about you; she loves you dearly. . . .

We have many English at Naples, as Lady's Malmsbury, Malden . . . etc. They are very kind and attentive to me. They all make it a point to be remarkably civil to me. You will be happy at this, as you know what prudes our Ladys are. Tell Hayley I am always reading his *Triumphs of Temper*. It was *that* that made me Lady H, for God knows I had for five years enough to try my temper, and I am afraid if it had not been for the good example Serena taught me, my girdle would have burst and, if it had, I had been undone, for Sir William more minds temper than beauty. He therefore wishes Mr. Hayley would come, that he may thank him for his sweet-tempered wife. I swear to you I have never once been out of temper since the 6th of last September. God bless you.

Yours,

E. HAMILTON.

Perhaps it ought to be explained that Serena was the heroine of Hayley's "*Triumphs of Temper*," a poem of which fourteen editions



were rapidly sold. Her magic girdle had a useful habit of warning her by a squeeze whenever she was on the point of losing her temper.

Before Emma's admirable letter could reach him, her departure had already lowered Romney back into his pit of dejection. He was, as usual, at Eartham for the autumn : but he did not take up the brush. On his return to London he wrote :—"I hope in a few days to be able to bring my mind into the old trammels of drudgery ; though it appears horrible to me to take up the trifling part of my profession." The company of Cowper, whom he met at Hayley's the following year, refreshed his mind, and he found relief in painting a few works other than portraits, including *Milton dictating to his Daughters*, and *Titania and Newton displaying the Prism*. But he was still haunted by the fear that his powers would soon fail ; and he resolved, after the fashion of worn-out opera-singers, that when he could no longer practise art he would teach it to others. Accordingly he began sowing seeds which brought him a harvest of trouble in the shape of ambitious building schemes which went awry. At Hampstead he bought a villa

for £700, but before his bizarre ideas had been realised, he had spent on it £3000. When his weakening mind was not playing with architectural fantasies, he was planning grandiose illustrations for the works of Milton, which were to be the crown of his life's activity. Meanwhile he reduced the number of his sitters and began to consider the finishing off of the half-executed canvases in his studio. A passage in Cumberland's *Memoirs* will show how this accumulation had come into existence.

A man of few wants, strict economy, and no dislike to money, he had opportunities enough to enrich him, even to satiety, but he was at once so eager to begin and so slow in finishing his portraits that he was for ever disappointed of receiving payment for them by the casualties and revolutions in the families they were designed for. So many of his sitters were killed off, so many favourite ladies dismissed, so many fond wives divorced, before he would bestow half an hour's pains on their petticoats, that his unsaleable stock was immense; while with a little more regularity and decision he would have more than doubled his fortune and escaped an infinity of petty troubles.

These unsold pictures were most of them ruined by being stacked for the winter of 1798-9 in a

wooden arcade of the foolish house at Hampstead.

After thirty years of absence he visited Mrs. Romney in 1798. But he had no intention of installing her at Hampstead. Nothing was to interfere with his Milton Gallery—not even portraits.

Back in London, Romney did not drift gradually out of portrait-painting, but abandoned it in a decisive and public way. He sold his house in Cavendish Square to the painter Shee (afterwards Sir Martin Shee, P.R.A.); and, as if to suggest that he had sold not only the house but also the portrait business as a going concern, he himself was Shee's first sitter. The big painting-room at Hampstead was ready, and the grand blank canvases invited his onslaught. But Romney's working-day was over. The stroke of paralysis which ended it was called a light one, but it was heavy enough to sound his knell as an artist. He sought Eartham; but Hayley, like himself, had lacked restraint in his hobby of building, and Romney's heart was saddened to see Eartham passing to strange owners. In the early summer he once more

went North with his son, and the South saw him no more.

Mrs. Romney could not have tended the broken man more devotedly if he had been the faithful partner of her hearth all the three-and-forty years of their married life. It is a relief to find that Romney did not worsen the errancy of his prime by ingratitude in his old age. He wrote fervently to Hayley of his wife's bottomless charity and goodness. This is the more worth noting because Hayley has often been accused of helping to keep Romney and his wife apart. As the "poet" had failed to live long with either of his own wives, it is certainly probable that he did not encourage the truant to encumber himself with a rustic spouse for whom there was no room in Pindar's and "Muse's" precious set ; but, as Romney had not seen his wife for nine years on the day he and Hayley first met, the "poet" must not be saddled with too much blame.

Although she was not a tame-spirited woman, Mrs. Romney herself never complained. Answering her son's demand for explanations, she merely said that she had always acted for the

best. Perhaps there was something in the case known to husband and wife alone. But, from whatever point one views the affair, surely one must regret Tennyson's poor stuff called "Romney's Remorse." Tennyson makes Romney contemplate the Last Judgment, and say :—

. . . if *He* should ask

"Why left you wife and children ? for My sake,  
According to My word ?" And I replied

"Nay, Lord, for Art," why that would sound so  
mean

That all the dead that wait the doom of Hell  
For bolder sins than mine, adulteries,  
Wife murders—nay the ruthless Mussulman  
Who flings his bow-strung Harem in the sea,  
Would turn and glare at me, and point and jeer,  
And gibber at the worm, who, living, made  
The wife of wives a widow bride, and lost  
Salvation for a sketch.

To dismiss Romney's achievement as "a sketch" will hardly do. One might as well call *In Memoriam* a couplet, or Niagara a leaking pipe, or St. Paul's Cathedral a half-brick. The comfortably born, warmly housed Tennyson based his exceedingly blank verse upon the

following sentences from a letter of Edward Fitzgerald's :—

I read Hayley's "Life of Romney" the other day. Romney wanted but education and reading to make him a very fine painter ; but his ideal was not high nor fixed. How touching is the close of his life ! He married at nineteen, and because Sir Joshua and others had said that "marriage spoilt an artist" almost immediately left his wife in the North, and scarce saw her again till the end of his life ; when old, nearly mad, and quite desolate, he went back to her, and she received him and nursed him till he died. This quiet act of hers is worth all Romney's pictures ! even as a matter of Art, I am sure.

It is hard to see why Tennyson could not leave this straightforward, adequate bit of prose alone. Some itch for versifying must have been strong upon him, with results so feeble that, if this were a fair sample of his work, we should have to class the "poet" Tennyson with the "poet" Hayley. It is a pity ; for Romney and Tennyson are so alike as artists that it is unpleasant to find one sitting in harsh judgment on the other. Each of them had a defect of virility and an excess of prettiness. Neither of them will endure in the scantily manned ranks of the

greater immortals ; and yet we hesitate to put them in the overcrowded second line. Alike in these respects, one would wish them to be alike in charity. Romney, who more than once rebuked detractors of his rival Sir Joshua, would have been less censorious to his better trained but not more gifted brother Tennyson.

Lady Hamilton returned from Naples in 1800. But she and Romney never met again. "The pleasure I should receive from a sight of the amiable Lady Hamilton would be as salutary as great," he wrote ; "yet I fear, except I should enjoy better health and better spirits at a better time of year, I shall never be able to see London again. I feel every day greater need of care and attention, and here I experience them in the highest degree."

Romney died on November 15, 1802. Almost immediately his fame began to enter the phase of eclipse from which it did not emerge until the nineteenth century was growing old. At the sale of the "studio remainders" in 1807, the *Mrs. Robinson (Perdita)* which now hangs by the side of Gainsborough's still greater portrait at Hertford House went for £16. The beautiful

*Mrs. Crouch* brought £5 15s. 6d., and the "poet" Tickell was ignominiously knocked down for seven shillings. Ninety years later a Romney was sold for ten thousand guineas.

Turning from the less important point of market-price to the essential point of Romney's artistic merit, one feels that he was a great painter within a small field. Outside portraiture he was of little account. But if it be true that the proper study of mankind is man, portraiture is a high business. Romney had not the intellect of Reynolds ; but, for that very reason, he surpassed Sir Joshua in the swift seizure and sure presentment of beauty for its own sake. In the amiable task of depicting girlhood at the wonderful time of its passage into womanhood he has never been excelled ; and, in this matter, the works of the too popular Greuze are album-verses beside the poems of Romney. For the general public his pictures have an advantage over Sir Joshua's inasmuch as the simple and graceful dressing of Romney's women makes them look less artificial and old-fashioned than his rival's. From the standpoint of the pure and simple painter, he is not to be named in the same



breath as Gainsborough ; yet, as a mere placer of pigments, he is not to be despised. Above all, he saved Emma from the fate of Helen and of Cleopatra. The legends of Helen's and Cleopatra's charms are no more than pale and scentless petals, lying thin and dry between the pages of dusty folios ; but Romney's divine lady still breathes out her sweetness, like a red rose of yester-eve.

## GEORGE MORLAND

(1763-1804)

TO the right and left of the door which admits one to the Hogarth or "Old British" Room in the National Gallery, hang two unmasterly pictures of laundry-maids at work. They were painted by Henry Robert Morland, mezzotint-engraver, portrait-maker both in pastels and in oils, picture-restorer, crayon-manufacturer, and dealer in artists' materials. For some time this industrious person lived at No. 47 Leicester Square, the still-standing house occupied later on by Sir Joshua Reynolds. On June 26, 1763, three years after Sir Joshua's removal to the old home, Henry Robert Morland's family was increased by a boy, who received the name of George.

Standing before the pictures of the laundry-maids, one suspects that they came from a conscientious hand and a cold heart. The suspicion

is well founded. Henry Morland was unsympathetic and stern. As for his French wife, she was described at first hand by James Ward as "a little strutting bantam who ruled the roost." Unhappily for everybody's peace and quietness, the little George did not take after either of his parents. He resembled rather his ancestor, Sir Samuel Morland, a four-times-married and once-excommunicated inventor and hydrostatician, who had lived gaily and extravagantly under the Merry Monarch on the site which afterwards became Vauxhall Gardens.

To ensure the small George's progress in virtue he was allowed neither to go to school nor to make playmates of other children. Toys and amusements were not allowed. Being thus compelled to work his baby brain, he developed his innate gift with a speed which puts all other precocious artists hopelessly in his rear. At three he was drawing animals with his finger on the dusty surfaces of furniture. At four, appearing to have designs on sundry blank canvases, he was literally kicked out of his father's studio, in the presence of no meaner a witness than Benjamin West. At seven he was painting

such huge convincing spiders on the ceilings that the housemaids were frightened nearly out of their lives. He would also pay off an old score or two against his father by drawing life-like beetles on the floor upon which the stern parent would stamp with results unhelpful to his dignity. More naughty still, he would imitate dropped crayons so closely that his father would stoop to pick them up.

Under his parents' own tuition, George received an education which Romney, who knew him in the seventeen-eighties, must have envied. He was taught French and Latin; and, like Gainsborough and Romney, he became a fair performer on the violin. He could play the oboe; could sing, having a serviceable bass voice; and could accompany himself on the piano. As Henry Morland kept his son close to his lessons in drawing and painting, George soon acquired such a habit of industry that the oft-disputed story of his having painted four thousand pictures in the course of his life is not incredible. At the age of ten he was exhibiting pastel-tinted drawings at the Royal Academy.

With George's fourteenth birthday came the

problem of his apprenticeship. But his parents, who had dreaded so much the noxious principles of the desperately wicked little boys whom George would have met at school, were doubly horrified at the perils which beset a 'prentice. Accordingly George was artiled to his own father for seven years ; and, although Romney made a handsome bid of £300 per annum, the apprentice worked out his term. Henry Morland was a hard but competent master, and under him George learned his business well. He clay-moulded many casts, including Gainsborough's Hatton Garden horse, learned perspective, drew from the antique, studied anatomy, and copied prints. When the daylight failed, he went on drawing by the aid of a lamp. He copied Sir Joshua's *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* and many other paintings of the hour. Before he was nineteen, he had seen his painting *A Hovel with Asses* hung at the Royal Academy ; had painted a series of paintings illustrating "The Faerie Queene" ; had made designs for a number of popular ballads ; and had drawn some political caricatures.

Despite his public importance, George was

still fast tied to his mother's apron-strings. With Philip Dawe, another of Henry Morland's articled pupils, he was allowed to spend Sundays in long tramps among those rural sights which furnished him with the fondest souvenirs of his austere youth and the kindest materials of his reckless maturity. But Dawe was the sole friend with whom he was suffered to spend an evening, as his parents "could rely on his not leaving their son till he had seen him safe home." As for pocket-money, he earned a little by his pencil on the sly ; but his wants were so modest that "a pennyworth of gingerbread would suffice him a whole day through a walk of twenty miles, during which few things escaped his observation and nothing that he observed was forgotten."

But boys will not be boys for ever. The evenings with Dawe began to be spent at a smoking club, called "The Congress," which was held at "The Cheshire Cheese." Morland's liveliness and his musical powers made him a favourite with the Congressmen, while Morland himself soon decided that his parents had vastly exaggerated the evils of merry company. One night a mad desire to break bounds refused to

be repressed. He dropped down the Thames in the Gravesend hoy, and for two whole days no one knew what had become of him. From Gravesend he tramped in the dead of night with a sailor and a carpenter as far as Chatham, where at break of day he warmed himself up with "purl" and gin. "Purl," which became too frequent a drink with George as the years went by, was a mixture of milk and ale, toned up with wormwood. From Chatham he sailed to the North Foreland and back, and narrowly escaped shipwreck. Less than forty-eight hours after leaving its doors, he was once more at "The Cheshire Cheese," holding forth gloriously in nautical terms, and every inch a sailor.

Having thus tasted life, George could not long brook the injudicious restraints of home. But it must be very carefully noted that, in leaving his parents, he was eager for liberty as an artist and not only for licence as a man. Nor did he show indecent, unfilial haste. Not until six months after his articles had expired did he leave the old roof-tree. Indeed, one tradition declares that he never left it at all of his own motion, but that his father gave him a guinea

and turned him out. This tradition, however, is untrustworthy.

Young Morland's first experience of independence was discouraging. He practically sold himself to a Drury Lane publisher, who sweated him outrageously. The sweater hired his dupe a lodging in Martlett's Court, Bow Street. Dawe says :—

Here Morland was doomed to drudge at his employer's price, which was contrived to be but just sufficient to procure him subsistence, lest he should gradually acquire the means of being independent of him. He would not allow him to work for any other person, and, the better to prevent it, was almost continually at his elbow. His meals were carried up to him by his employer's boy, and when his dinner was brought, which generally consisted of sixpennyworth of meat from the cook-shop, with a pint of beer, he would sometimes venture to ask if he might not have a pennyworth of pudding.

Before long the employer, who boasted some depraved clients, had the effrontery to demand that his victim should make certain designs of an unworthy nature. To Morland's honour let it be recorded that he disobeyed ; and, to the end of his life, however degraded he might be in his



habits and surroundings, he maintained in his work a standard of delicacy equal to Gainsborough's own.

Lacking courage to beard the tyrant, Morland ran away, first locking his room and pocketing the key so that his employer would be responsible for more rent. A wealthy Mrs. Hill, who admired his work, had invited him to her house at Margate; so he hired a horse and set out. The beast being a good one and after the rider's own heart, Morland neglected to return it for six or seven weeks. That he was in good spirits is evident from the following letter to Philip Dawe :—

SHIP INN, DOVER,

*Friday.*

DAWE,—I arrived at Margate on Wednesday, surveyed the town on Thursday, and drank tea at Dover on Friday. Here is one of the pleasantest spots in the world; a fine view of the clift and castle, with the pier and shipping; opposite are the Calais clifts, which seem so very near as to appear not above three or four miles over. A very large and pretty town is Dover, and looks something like London; but of all the horrible places that can be imagined Sandwich is the worst. 'Tis very likely I shall go over to France with Mrs. Hill; she is talking about it. My com-

pliments to the Congress, except that Jew-looking fellow. I have swam my horse in the sea several times. I shall be glad of an answer.

I am, yours etc.,

MORLAND.

Under Mrs. Hill's auspices the young man was in serious danger of becoming a portrait-painter. Perceiving his peril, he left her house after two months and hired a lodging whence he might sally out at any time among the soldiers and postboys and old salts who were to furnish the contents of his best pictures. But he remained on the best of terms with Mrs. Hill, with whose maid, Jenny, he was secretly in love. She was seventeen years old, over six feet high, and altogether "one of the sweetest creatures ever seen by man." Morland's taste in human beings was not exclusive. His fellow-lodger and bosom friend, Mr. Sherborne, was brother to Lord Digby ; but Morland thought that "some nobleman's brother" was a sufficient description of him. Meanwhile he was both painting and drinking hard. Jenny, after she had returned to London, wrote to him by every post, and at last Morland told Dawe that the marriage was to

take place in three weeks. But he was not a grand lover, and was soon worried by doubts. He wrote to Dawe :—

If I marry her I am undone, by reason Mrs. Hill must find it out—it cannot be avoided ; her acquaintances in London would inform her of it in France, she would then throw me aside. Besides, many gentlemen would give my acquaintance up if I perform my promise with her, and which as I certainly like her *better than any other*, I am determined to perform after my arrival in London, *if that should ever happen*.

Mrs. Hill, not Jenny, was the conquering heroine. At the end of October, 1785, she and Morland sailed for Calais. But Venus did not call upon Aeolus to punish his apostasy. A favourable wind blew the runaway to France almost as quickly as a turbine-steamer would carry him to-day. From pier to pier his time was ninety-two minutes. Like Hogarth he was peevish at first with France and things French ; but at St. Omer, the good town where so much has been done for England, he was happier. Even to-day, with one of its greatest churches in ruins and many other ecclesiastical buildings secularised, St. Omer is a pleasant spot. Mor-

land loved it, because there were fourpenny coach fares and no risks of running against Jenny. He almost decided to settle for life in France, where, he said, one could live very well on thirty pounds a year. But he was back in Margate for the winter, and in London, at his parents' house, for the spring.

Jenny's affair had to be settled ; but Morland was never a great man at facing discordant music. Rather shabbily convincing himself and his friends that neither his health nor his fortune would allow him to marry, he despatched an ambassador-plenipotentiary to Jenny, who was to obtain Morland's release if possible. Failing this, Jenny was to name the day. The ambassador's account of Morland's position was so alarming that Jenny's brother put his foot down and forbade the marriage.

Thus meanly off with the old, Morland made haste to be on with the new. The second fair one was a maidservant, the daughter of a tailor. Once more a friend was called in to help. This time the friend's duty was simply to accompany Morland to the tailor's house, thus giving some moral support to the pleading suitor. But, on

the way, the friend repented and went home. Morland, left alone, got as far as the tailor's house ; but there his courage failed him, and he abandoned the damsel rather than face the father.

It is the third time that brings luck. Morland, soon afterwards, became acquainted with the engraver, William Ward, brother of James Ward, the excellent animal painter. Morland was only three years William Ward's senior ; and the two young men had so many tastes in common, especially music, that Morland went to lodge with the Wards at Kensal Green. Here he found a good atmosphere. The Wards were quite as respectable as George's rigid and uncomfortable parents ; yet their homely musical evenings were as enjoyable as the rowdy nights at "The Cheshire Cheese," and much more so than that dull orgy at Margate, where, on George's own confession, almost everybody in the town got drunk to celebrate a joint fox-hunt and Freemasons' gathering. No wonder that Morland, after meeting the Wards, painted works with such titles as *Domestic Happiness* and *The Happy Family*.

Anne Ward, William's sister, was "a young lady of beauty and modesty." She and her family did not repel the suit which Morland soon pressed upon them ; and, in July, 1786, the two were married at Hammersmith Church. The bridegroom showed a regrettable mind by insisting on wearing two pistols stuck in his belt ; but to quote a contemporary, "the general opinion was that a prettier couple had never graced the interior of that sacred edifice in the memory of the oldest spectator present."

One good turn deserves another. William Ward having brought Morland a bride, Morland made his own sister Maria known to William ; and, within a month of the first wedding, there was a second. The two couples set up a joint home in High Street, Marylebone. But there was one pair too many in this little Garden of Eden ; and, before three months had passed, the two bridegrooms are said to have begun potting at each other with slug-loaded horse-pistols in an old saw-pit. The Morlands left the Wards in possession and removed to Camden Town, which was still a rural spot.

Allan Cunningham's statement that "Morland married without being in love" is true in the sense that Morland was incapable of a grand romantic passion for anybody. But when "the Scottish Vasari" goes on to suggest that Morland ill-treated his wife, the suggestion needs defining. Mrs. Morland suffered, and he himself suffered far more, from her husband's improvidence; and, although she had no children, it must have been painful and humiliating to be perpetually beating strategic retreats from bailiffs. But it is untrue that Morland ever deserted his wife. Dawe, who knew them both, says that they were "sincerely attached to each other, insomuch that the one was extremely alarmed and affected whenever the other happened to be indisposed."

Morland worked hard; but money came in slowly. In the marriage-year, his *Flowery Banks of the Shannon* was shown at the Royal Academy, and he was beginning to be widely known through engravings of his works. Yet his *Mad Bull*, a composition with twenty figures in it, was sold for half a guinea. His *Laetitia* series—six pictures forming a "Progress" much





gentler in tone than Hogarth's—brought him only a few pounds, although it was destined to be sold for £5880 in 1904 at Christie's. By degrees matters mended a little, and the young people moved once more into a larger house. Morland's activity was prodigious. In 1788 eleven engravers were busy upon thirty-two finished and important pictures from his brush. These included *Children Playing at Soldiers*, and many more of those engaging scenes of childhood in which he has never been excelled; *The Visit to the Boarding-School*, now at Hertford House; *The Slave Trade*, which redounds to Morland's lasting honour as a plea for the slave, painted at a time when abolition was still unpopular; the famous *Dancing Dogs*; and that popular pair of moral pictures *The Fruits of Early Industry and Economy* and *The Effects of Extravagance and Idleness*.

Marriage did not make a man of Morland to the extent of curing his cowardice or slackness when unpleasant or tiresome business had to be faced. In consequence, he lost most of the fruit of his labours. A certain Irwin began to act as his agent in selling pictures, the transaction

being complicated by occasional advances from Irwin's wealthier brother. Irwin sold at least fifty works for fifteen guineas apiece, but he paid only seven guineas apiece to Morland. There are reasons for believing that one of these seven-guinea works was the wonderful *Dancing Dogs*, which was sold at the Tweedmouth sale in 1905 for four thousand guineas.

Morland was a swift and sure worker ; but he did not produce his masterpieces without infinite pains. He maintained that child-models must be taken unawares, and therefore he would have children, to whom he was always kind, playing about in his studio for hours. He became a constable, so as to collect materials for his more serious works, and his four pictures called *The Deserter* were studied from a sergeant, soldier, and drummer whom he entertained for a night and a whole Sunday, sketching and putting questions nearly all the time. While he was at work on stable subjects, such as the grand *Inside of a Stable* in the National Gallery, he would scatter straw about his house, so as to study its forms and the play of interior light upon it.



THE INSIDE OF A STABLE

By,

GEORGE MORLAND

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

Indeed, so laboriously did he strive at *The Straw-yard*, which is a companion picture to *The Inside of a Stable*, that he painted on it, "No more straw-yards for me, G. Morland." Seeing an old white nag on its way to slaughter, he bought it, kept it a fortnight in his painting-room, and introduced it into many pictures. His visits to waterside taverns and poor ale-houses were prompted by a desire to study humble models rather than by low instincts. Hassall, one of his biographers, first saw Morland "posting before him with a pig which he held in his arms as if it had been a child." As models of the smaller birds and beasts, he kept a menagerie of monkeys, hogs, squirrels, foxes, goats, cats, dogs, guinea-pigs, rabbits, mice, ducks, pigeons, barn-yard fowls, and ever so many other four-footed and two-footed creatures.

His unbroken industry and growing popularity soon brought Morland, in spite of his bad habits as a business man, an income running into four figures. But he spent more than he received. Ten years before, a penn'orth of gingerbread had made him happy for a whole day: but by 1789 he owed £200 beyond what he could

hope to pay. In mortal fear of a debtors' prison, he visited the King's Bench gaol so as to see if gaols were as bad as Hogarth had painted them. Returning home in horror he fell to, and, by 1791, had paid off all his debts.

Paddington in 1791 was still a pleasant seat of dairy-farming. Thither Morland repaired. His cottage was opposite a picturesque Tudor inn, "The White Lion," where he could find such horses, dogs, postboys and other men and beasts as he required. *The Inside of a Stable* was studied at "The White Lion." But the mob of spongers on his conviviality would not leave him to work in peace. Before long he was keeping eight or ten horses at livery, chiefly for the pleasure of his so-called friends: he was renting a large *salle d'armes*; and was feasting stray acquaintances at "The White Lion." Twelve months of this life convinced him that he might as well go back to open extravagance; so he left his cottage for a house, and engaged a footman and two grooms, and threw prudence to the winds. He still worked hard and earned a great deal. For example, he painted *Watering*



RUBBING DOWN THE POST-HORSE

By

GEORGE MORLAND

*After the Painting*

*the Farmer's Horse* and *Rubbing Down the Post-horse* in one day; and he often earned a hundred guineas a week. Yet, before another year had passed, he owed £3,700.

Suddenly sobered by a second gaol-nightmare he tried to settle down in Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square. At first he was under bond to pay off his creditors to the extent of £120 a month. Finding this impossible, the monthly obligation was reduced to £100, an amount he could have raised quite easily had he not persisted in his foolish courses of giving fresh promissory notes and selling pictures for trifling sums on a hand-to-mouth principle. At last some of his creditors lost patience; and from 1793 to the end of his wild life, Morland was a hunted man. In dread of arrest, he could only venture abroad after nightfall, and very often he was forced to hide himself in wretched lodgings, sometimes in meaner London, sometimes in country towns or obscure villages. Having no other friends in such places, he naturally turned to the free and open society of the taverns with disastrous results. Here is his own record of "G. Morland's list for one day

at Brighton, having nothing to do." It is in a letter to his brother:—

Rum and Milk	.	.	}	Before Breakfast
Hollands Gin	.	.		

Coffee—Breakfast

Hollands	.	.	.	}	Before Dinner
Porter	.	.	.		
Shrub	.	.	.		
Ale	.	.	.		
Hollands and Water	.				
Port Wine with Ginger	.				
Bottled Porter	.	.			

Port Wine—at Dinner and after

Port Wine

Porter

Bottled Porter

Punch

Porter

Ale

Opium and Water

Port Wine—at Supper

Gin and Water

Shrub

Rum, on going to Bed

In case any reader should smile at such a catalogue as a hoax, the writer of this book is



sorry to say that he knows a living Bohemian who is inferior to Morland in genius but fully his equal in thirst. Upon the original of his sad confession, Morland sketched his own tombstone, and added the epitaph: "Here lies a drunken dog."

Collapsing as a man, Morland nevertheless held his own as an artist. His drunken dog-days were the high-summer of his artistic flowering. The more stormy, unwholesome, and vicious his life became, the more he strove to redress the balance by painting calm and sweet and virtuous scenes of rustic life. The more he debased himself in stuffy drinking-dens, the grander became his elemental visions of cliff and sea and sky. The worse his own faith with his creditors, the more his brush did homage to honourable toil. He was an ignoble sinner propitiating Virtue with noble altar-pieces. But this could not go on for ever. A man divided against himself cannot stand: and the time came when Morland's art and himself sank in a common ruin.

The earlier years of his life as a fugitive from writs and bailiffs were not all panic and despair.

Mr. Wedd, his indefatigable solicitor, would sometimes succeed in so arranging matters that his client could enjoy truces among his friends. And even when he was in hiding his lively disposition rapidly asserted itself. He would make friends with gipsies, pedlars, tramps and watermen, as much to their satisfaction as his own.

Practical joking often cheered Morland in his exile. One day he saw a party of anglers, whom he had been sketching, cast their lines into the water and betake themselves to the nearest inn. Pulling up the hooks, Morland fastened to them some old shoes which he had found on the shore, and lowered them again into the water. The returning anglers, seeing their floats strongly submerged, were sure they had hooked big fish, and Morland had the joy of seeing the catch hauled in. On another occasion he took with him a ventriloquist to buy a fish. "Is it quite fresh?" he asked suspiciously. The fish-wife assured him it was only just out of the water. Then the ventriloquist got to work. From the fish's lips came a solemn protest that he was, to put it mildly, not all he ought to have been. Unhappily he made



FISHERMEN HAULING IN A BOAT

By

GEORGE MORLAND

*From the Painting in the Victoria and Albert Museum*

this announcement in language which no respectable fish should use to a lady under any provocation whatsoever ; and this was not the only case in which Morland's practical joking ceased to be funny by beginning to be vulgar.

A closely-printed page of this book would hardly contain a complete list of Morland's residences during the last ten years of his life. Enderby, in Leicestershire ; Red Lion Square, Chelsea, Lambeth, Queen Anne Street East, Kentish Town, Frith Street, China Row, Newington, Leadenhall Street and Hackney, in or near eighteenth-century London ; Cowes, Yarmouth and Freshwater in the Isle of Wight—these were only a few of the places where he lived in alternate calm and storm. Fortunately his mobility was perfect ; for, having once had his portmanteau cut from behind in a post-chaise he travelled thereafter “like a snail, with all his property on his back.”

Living a life necessarily attended by secrecy and mystery, Morland had to bear extra troubles which were not of his own direct making. Nothing fails like failure. At Hackney his talk, in a tavern, about “copper-plates” and

"impressions" aroused a suspicion that he was a fabricator of flash bank-notes, and he had to fly from the constables sent by the Bank of England to arrest him. In the Isle of Wight, where he was taken for a spy, he and his drawings were seized by a lieutenant and eight militiamen, who marched him twelve miles to Newport, under a burning sun, to clear his character.

These arrests were false alarms. But by 1799 the battle against his creditors became hopeless. Although Morland was only thirty-six he had already made acquaintance with apoplexy, and his wife's health also had begun to fail. By the advice of Mr. Wedd, he hoisted the white flag and allowed himself to be arrested and taken to the King's Bench prison. But, under Mr. Wedd's clever management, the imprisonment was only nominal. By paying certain fees the debtor was allowed to "live within the rules." In other words, he became a sort of ticket-of-leave man. "The rules," or "liberties," were three miles in circumference, and Morland, getting as far as possible from the centre, took a furnished house in St. George's Fields. His wife and his brother Henry lived with him, and

he continued to turn out large numbers of pictures; but he had passed his zenith. "The rules" did not admit of his faring forth to work from animate and inanimate Nature by field and hedgerow and rocky shore; nor did his hard taskmasters and creditors the picture-dealers permit him to choose his own subjects.

By paying extra fees a debtor could occasionally gain a day's leave to be spent in a run outside "the rules." This favour was granted on condition that the prisoner should not enter a tap-room and that he should return within "the rules" at an hour appointed. For a time Morland obeyed orders. But one day Mr. Jones, the prison-marshal, found him in the tap-room of a public-house. He wound up a sharp scolding by threatening to make Morland's imprisonment a stern reality. It happened, however, that Morland, at this very time, was painting a picture for the marshal. He went home, executed the work at a single sitting, and appeared with it before the marshal the next morning. It was a representation of the tap-room, with Morland himself figuring among the drinkers, and with the marshal gratefully lean-

ing in through the window and taking from Morland's hand a glass of gin.

Gin, with which London reeked in his days, went on doing its deadly work on Morland's broken constitution. In 1802 apoplexy delivered a second warning. Illness also attacked Mrs. Morland, who had to be removed to purer air on the other side of the Thames. Years of excursions and alarums had not destroyed her affection; and she was often heard to say that, if her husband should die before her, she would follow him to the grave in three days.

The Corporation of Nottingham possesses an unutterably sad picture, from his own hand, of Morland painting in an attic. With drawn and weary face he is pausing to rest while his man cooks a mean meal over a sputtering fire. The fatal bottle is on the floor. Probably the reality was even sadder than this sad picture. Only by the aid of the strongest glasses could Morland see to work; he would jump at the smallest noise; and he would often burst into tears. Without two night-lights in the room—the second in case the first failed—he dared not go to bed. Dawe says: "If the light happened

to be extinguished in a room where he was sitting, he would creep towards the fire, or the person next to him."

Morland's flame leapt up before it died. The Insolvent Debtors Act of 1802 released him from "the rules"; and, at "The Black Bull," a Highgate inn, he had the joy of watching the out- and home-bound stage coaches, of which there were then nearly a hundred a day. But the money-getting grind in London had to be faced once more. His eyes grew dimmer and his left hand became paralysed. A few new debts accumulated upon him, and one of these caused his death. One autumn day, as he was taking the air supported on his servant's arm, a creditor stopped him and demanded the repayment of ten pounds. In default of the money, Morland was immediately arrested and carried off to a sponging-house. With a huge effort he set himself to paint a last picture which should purchase his liberty; but he fell to the ground in a fit, and died from brain fever on October 29th, 1804.

Friends, who had heard of her presentiment, tried in vain to keep the news from Mrs.



Morland ; and, within three days, she too was dead. They were buried in one grave at St. James's Chapel, in the Hampstead Road.

"Here lies a Drunken Dog." Thus had Morland worded his own epitaph. The world, always ready to believe a man's word about his own vices, has taken care to keep his memory black. But the Morland revealed in his pictures is the principal part of the Morland who exists for us to-day ; and over that larger Morland a more truthful epitaph would be :—

HERE

with Her who loved him unto Death

lies

GEORGE MORLAND,

Painter,

who, recoiling from the restraint of injudicious parents,

treated Some well, Others ill, and Himself

the worst of All.

BELOVED

of Dumb Beasts and of Little Children, he practised  
some Virtues in his life and preached no Vices in his Art.

HE DIED POOR

in a Debtors' Prison,

leaving England rich by the productions of his Genius.

His Short Day was Stormy :

May He Rest in Peace.

Standing before this imaginary monument, we may take leave of the man Morland by recalling one more story of his last years. Collins had a clever son who was consumed with desire to see the great artist at work. For two hours Morland, who was so weak and ill that he had to be supported at the easel, plied his brush for the boy's encouragement and delight, only ceasing when he sank down in sheer exhaustion. They bear false witness against the dead who say that he was always profuse but never generous.

As for Morland the artist, his fame is secure. Uncatholic connoisseurs may be met with here and there who declare that they cannot be interested in his painting because his strong subject-interest gets in their eyes' way. Boys robbing orchards, they say, may please the general, but the elect would prefer less palpable Boys and a less practicable Orchard. But this is a confession of incompetence. So long as it is not keeping downright vulgar company, a fully endowed human being rejoices over good painting wherever he may encounter it. A man who requires paint to be, so to speak, isolated,

and sets up a cry of Paint for Paint's sake, is erring as widely from the centre of truth as the man who cares for the subject of a picture alone. If Morland's anecdotal or didactic paintings were like the "Don't be Frightened" or "I's Biggest" supplements to the Christmas magazines, or if they were as meanly conceived as the platitudinous "religious" allegories of a certain living painter whose works are so honourably hung at Burlington House, then one could understand an impatient turning-away from their technical merits. But the truth is that Morland's subject-matter is nearly always as delightful as his treatment, and every year his pictures become more precious as a record of the Old England which is passing away. From our corrugated-iron we can turn to his golden thatch and moss-rich tiles; from our steam-engines and bicycles and motor-cars to his hay-wains and post-horses and stage-coaches; and from our "lower classes," all dressed in cheap imitations of towny fashions, to his peasantry and watermen and attendants upon the noble horse, each one of them living his characteristic life. And, in Morland's case, we can be sure that we are not

looking at pretty fancies, for it was well said of him on the morrow of his death that he “would never risk truth, but would rather give twenty guineas to have a cat stolen for him than presume to paint one from an uncertain remembrance.”

## LAWRENCE

(1769-1831)

WHILE the small George Morland was painting spiders on London ceilings and black-beetles on London floors, a man of many parts was keeping The White Lion Inn at Bristol. The son of a Presbyterian pastor, he had been, in turn, a lawyer, "a poetaster, spouter of odes, actor, revenue-officer, and farmer," and in none of these callings had he prospered. Even as a publican this rolling-stone gathered no moss; and his tenancy of "The White Lion" would have been ignominious had it not been distinguished by the birth of a son who became in due time President of the Royal Academy and Sir Thomas Lawrence.

Thomas was born on May 4, 1769, being his parents' sixteenth and youngest child. Most of his brothers and sisters were dead before he was born. When the boy was about three years old

"The White Lion" had to be given up owing to pecuniary troubles, and the family removed to "The Black Bear" at Devizes, a hostelry which survives to encourage the twentieth-century motorist. As Devizes was a fashionable halt upon the Bath road, there were seasons of the year when it overflowed with persons of quality.

Little Thomas's precocity was only inferior to little Morland's. At the age of five he was credited with a real talent in drawing, and especially in portraiture. But his versatility would have put Morland in the shade. Young Lawrence, using a table as a platform, could declaim Milton and the odes of Collins in so professional a style that his father would introduce him to "The Black Bear's" guests with the formula: "Gentlemen, here's my son. Will you have him recite from the poets or take your portraits?" His education was neglected, but the child's eager mind found its own food. His long fair hair, hanging on his shoulders, his sweet voice and graceful gestures, seemed to mark him for the stage. Indeed, Garrick, whose powerful personality had already influenced

Hogarth and Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney, was puzzled as to the child's destiny. One day on his way home from Bath the great actor demanded of "The Black Bear's" host if "Tommy had learnt any more speeches." Over tea in the summer-house of the inn garden Tommy recited some more Shakespeare, and, at the end of the performances, Garrick clapped him on the back and cried, "Bravely done, Tommy! Whether will ye be, a painter or a player? Eh?"

Posting up her diary at Bath in April, 1780, Sir Joshua's "little Burney" wrote:—

We were extremely pleased with them [Tommy's two sisters] and made them a long visit, which I wished to have been longer. But though these pretty girls struck us so much, the wonder of the family was yet to be produced. This was their brother, a most lovely boy of ten years of age, who seems to be not merely the wonder of their family, but of the times for his astonishing skill in drawing. They protest he has never had any instruction, yet showed us some of his productions that were really beautiful. Those that were copies were delightful—those of his own composition amazing, though far inferior. I was also struck with the boy and his works.

But not even the attractions of his *Wunderkind* enabled Tommy's father to maintain himself

successfully at "The Black Bear." By 1779 Devizes had become as uncomfortable as Bristol, and another move was made, this time to Oxford. It seems to be true that Tommy, at the age of ten, became the principal support of his parents, and that they remained dependent upon him until their death in 1796. As a brace of lords, a countess, and a bishop or two were among his patrons, he was able to obtain enough commissions to keep his precious parents going. But Oxford could not content them for long. All their lives their ears had been wont to tingle at the magic name of Bath—the Bath where Mr. Gainsborough had literally turned golden guineas away from his front-door. After a visit to Weymouth, where, of course, the King was the attraction, to Bath the whole family went. They hired a house at a hundred pounds a year, and, although something came back through the letting of lodgings, Tommy was their chief breadwinner. His modest price of a guinea for a picture was raised to a guinea and a half, quite in the professional way, and Bath duly went mad over the infant-prodigy.

The boy Lawrence's earliest works were not



paintings. Most of them were in coloured crayons, or in black and red lead. Their shape was oval and their size generally half-life. One of them, *Mrs. Siddons as Aspasia*, was engraved at a considerable profit. Thus was Thomas Lawrence, at twelve years of age, fairly launched upon a remunerative career. One cannot help thinking, in this connection, of Constable and Corot, two incomparably greater artists, each of whom had to wait until he was nearly forty before selling his first picture. Yet Lawrence's was, after all, the harder luck. By being made to run before he had fairly learned to walk, he was thwarted of the noble gait and port of which his genius was capable. He came to know this himself, and his words were true of many things besides his finance when he wrote to a friend in later years : "I began life badly."

With an average of four new sitters a week, at the further enhanced fee of three guineas each, the young pastellist became ambitious. To complete his resemblance to his fellow portrait-painters, he essayed a *Christ bearing the Cross*, a picture eight feet long, in the grand style. This has disappeared. That he had a good all-round

conceit of himself appears from his saying : "Excepting Sir Joshua, for the painting of a head, I would risk my reputation with any painter in London." But his head was not wholly turned, for he bent all his efforts towards London and the tuition to be found there.

At the age of eighteen Thomas had his desire. In the autumn of 1787 he was admitted as a student of the Royal Academy. He struck a fellow-student as "a very genteel, handsome young man, but rather effeminate." Effeminacy rarely goes with shyness, and therefore the very genteel young man was not tardy in presenting himself and his works to Sir Joshua. "You have been looking at the old masters, I see," said the grand old man, "but my advice is this : Study Nature, study Nature." Lawrence could not, or would not, and certainly did not follow this wise counsel, and consequently his works have the monotony of a pretty mannerism rather than the infinite variety of external truth. But although the young man, consciously or unconsciously, declined the old man's guidance, he repeatedly accepted invitations to No. 47 Leicester Square. There, if he learned little of Sir

Joshua's art, at least he perfected himself in courtly speech.

Had Lawrence's humility been much less than it was, he could have pleaded as an excuse that London was already accepting him as an artist who had "arrived." His price for a head soon rose to ten guineas, and if he had not allowed his parents £300 a year and made himself responsible for some of their debts, he would have been a rich man. *Homer reciting the Iliad to the Greeks* did him no more good than the grand style had done to his forerunners ; but in 1790 he painted the lucky portrait of Miss Farren, afterwards Lady Derby, which immediately won European fame. Lawrence's adversaries fell foul of him for what they called the inconsistency between Miss Farren's winter furs and the summer landscape in the background ; but the general public, with a keener recollection of the British climate, found nothing amiss. An exceptionally beautiful engraving of this *Miss Farren*, stippled in colours, was sold in almost unprecedented numbers. From Miss Farren, Lawrence went on to paint Lady Hamilton ; and from Lady Hamilton to the Royal Family.

George the Third made him his Painter-in-ordinary, in succession to Sir Joshua Reynolds ; and the Royal Academy created for his express benefit the title of "Supplemental Associate."

Lawrence had barely attained his majority when he was able to command a hundred guineas for a full-length portrait. He boasted a private secretary and an imposing lodging in Old Bond Street. Expenditure usually outrunning income, he was forced to stick to portrait-painting in the main ; but he still hankered after imaginative compositions. In the Diploma Gallery may be seen his ambitious *Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen*, an attempt to show Satan rallying the rebellious angels. This work was almost as ill received as poor Hogarth's *Sigismunda*. One gentle critic complained that Lawrence's Devil was "all arms and legs and might be taken for a sign of the Spread Eagle." He added, very elegantly : "It is so coloured that it conveys the idea of a mad sugar-baker dancing naked in the conflagration of his own treacle." Fuseli said it was "a d——d thing certainly, but not the Devil." Still, as Lawrence himself was fairly well satisfied, no great harm was done.

Lawrence's mother died in 1796 and was quickly followed to the grave by her husband, who had increased his debts by holding a foolish show of stuffed birds and other curiosities, intermingled with Thomas's drawings. Up to the time of his parents' death the painter devoted himself to them, and he must have been nearly twenty-eight years old before he fell seriously in love. The hapless girl upon whom his fatal choice descended was Sally Siddons, Mrs. Siddons' eldest daughter. For more than a hundred years the truth of this tangled romance lay hidden, and Lawrence's biographers knew no more than is contained in the following passage from Fanny Kemble's "Record of a Girlhood":—

While frequenting [Mrs. Siddons'] house upon terms of the most affectionate intimacy, he proposed to her eldest daughter, my cousin Sarah, and was accepted by her. Before long, however, he became deeply dejected, moody, restless, and evidently extremely and unaccountably wretched. Violent scenes of the most painful emotion, of which the cause was inexplicable and incomprehensible, took place repeatedly between himself and Mrs. Siddons, to whom he finally, in a paroxysm of self-abandoned misery, confessed that he had mistaken his own feelings, and that her younger daughter, and not the elder, was the

real object of his affection, and ended by imploring permission to transfer his addresses from the one to the other sister. How this most extraordinary change was accomplished I know not ; but only that it took place, and that Maria Siddons became engaged to her sister's faithless lover. To neither of them, however, was he destined ever to be united ; they were both exceedingly delicate young women, with a tendency to consumption, which was probably developed and accelerated in its progress in no small measure by all the bitterness and complicated difficulties of the disastrous double courtship.

Maria, the youngest, an exceedingly beautiful girl, died first ; and on her death-bed exacted from her sister a promise that she would never become Lawrence's wife ; the promise was given and she died, and had not lain long in her untimely grave when her sister was laid in it beside her. The death of these two lovely and amiable women broke off all connection between Sir Thomas Lawrence and [Mrs. Siddons], and from that time they never saw or had any intercourse with each other.

The case would be bad enough even if it were no worse than Fanny Kemble imagined. But, in 1904, Mr. Oswald G. Knapp<sup>1</sup> printed verbatim

<sup>1</sup> "An Artist's Love-Story : Told in the Letters of Sir Thomas Lawrence, Mrs. Siddons, and her Daughters," edited by Oswald G. Knapp, M.A. (London, 1904). Mr. Knapp's volume evoked "Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter-bag" (London, 1906), edited by Mr. George Somes Layard, but this book throws hardly any fresh light on the affair.

a many-sided correspondence which pours daylight over a tragedy so complicated that few six-shilling novelists would have the courage to offer its like to the reviewers. Mr. Knapp's treasure-trove of desperate epistles, which is studded all over with italics, capital letters, and marks of exclamation, seems to tell us that Lawrence, about 1796-7, did indeed fall in love with Sally Siddons, but that he did not carry a formal suit to completion. Mr. and Mrs. Siddons knew nothing of the affair; and therefore when he cooled towards Sally and warmed towards Maria, the trouble was restricted to himself and the two girls. His task was difficult. But Sally was unselfish and high-minded; and Lawrence had a lifelong skill in managing women, as appears from the testimony of a lady who said: "It cannot be too strongly stated that his manner was likely to mislead without his intending it. He could not write a common answer to a dinner invitation without its assuming the tone of a billet-doux. The very commonest conversation was held in that soft, low whisper, and with that tone of deference and interest which are so unusual and so calculated to please." Somehow



MRS. SIDDONS

By

SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*



the transfer was made without any rupture between the sisters or any painful recourse to mamma.

It is at this point that the huge gap in Fanny Kemble's information begins. Her narrative implies that Lawrence was well pleased with his new sweetheart, and that, had she lived, they would have married. The whole truth is far more startling. After a brief experience of Maria, Lawrence discovered that his passion for Sally had been not dead but sleeping, and that his infatuation for her younger sister was merely an episode, an aberration. Thenceforth he put his whole mind to undoing his mistake and regaining Sally ; and it was no doubt at this stage that he fell into the restlessness and wretchedness which, as Miss Kemble says, led to stormy scenes with Mrs. Siddons.

To the end of her short life Sally appears to have remained in love with Lawrence. But, having a mind and a will as well as a heart and feeling, she did not encourage a second wooing from the jilter of Maria. For the full sequel one must turn to Mr. Knapp's book ; but here is the story in brief. Maria was sent to the Hot Wells,

near Bristol, where her malady of consumption defied the baths and the physicians. Her hostess was Mrs. Pennington, wife of the Master of Ceremonies at the Wells, and therefore an accessible lady. Here came Lawrence's opportunity. He hurried to Clifton, put up at an inn under an assumed name, and opened fire on Mrs. Pennington with a letter which would overflow five pages of the present volume. Among a great many other frantic things he wrote :—

My name is Lawrence, and you then, I believe, know that I stand in the most afflicting situation possible ! A man charg'd . . . with having inflicted pangs on one lovely Creature, which, in their bitterest extent, he himself now suffers from her sister. I love—exist but for Miss Siddons, and am decisively rejected by her.

He enclosed a missive (which has perished) for Sally herself, and begged Mrs. Pennington to pass it on, adding :—

By a profligate daring I might see Miss Siddons, but I cannot. Yet something I must do, and what better than at once repose a confidence in a Woman of Sense and Honour, trust implicitly to her Candour, nor believe that I shall suffer by it till the suffering comes ?

I have done it, and perhaps all of my future happiness is at stake and in your Power.

Partly because she was a kindly soul, and partly because she shared the widespread feminine inability to stand outside a love-affair, Mrs. Pennington made Lawrence a conditional promise of assistance. In his letter of thanks the lover burst out: "Sally, dear Angel, shall I indeed see you!!!" He did not, at first, see the lovely Creature. But he saw Mrs. Pennington instead; and such was his "wretched madman's frenzy" (to borrow Mrs. Siddons' phrase) that Mrs. Pennington spoke him plain. She said, "I have seen such scenes better acted before."

"This torment of a man," as Mrs. Pennington called him, next confronted Mrs. Siddons herself. He threatened suicide, but soon watered the menace down to Switzerland. A letter from Mrs. Siddons runs :—

He told me some time ago, when he was as mad about Maria as he is now about Sally, that if she rejected him he would fly to compose his Spirit to the mountains of Switzerland. Maria reigned sole arbitress of his fate for two years or more. The other day he told me if he lost *Sally* SWITZERLAND was still his resource.

In these detestable circumstances, Sally herself was admirable. Answering one of Lawrence's

interminable and innumerable letters, Mrs. Pennington acutely said :—

I am inclined to think a great part of what lies before me is rather written *at* dear Sally than *to* me ; and it is only honest to tell you that she has the firmness to resist taking any part in this correspondence, and will neither peruse nor hear read your Letters nor my Replys.

Poor Maria died, only nineteen years old, on October 7, 1798. Lawrence, either by a presentiment or on the strength of something which may have passed between himself and his abandoned sweetheart, had been haunted by the fear that, on her death-bed, the unhappy girl might exact a last promise from Sally destructive to his hopes. These fears were justified by the event. The day after Maria's death, Mrs. Pennington despatched to Lawrence one of the most touching letters ever penned. It is very long, and Mr. Knapp's transcription of it should be perused *in extenso*. Here is an extract :—

But how am I to proceed ? How tell you that *all* which you *fear'd* HAS HAPPENED ?

In her *dying* accents, her last solemn injunction was given, and repeated some hours afterwards in the presence of Mrs. Siddons. She call'd her Sister—said

how dear, how sweet, how *good* she was—that one only care for her welfare pressed on her mind. “Promise me, my Sally, *never* to be the wife of Mr. Lawrence. I *cannot* BEAR to *think* of *your* being so.” Sally evaded the promise; not but that a thousand recent circumstances had made up her mind to the sacrifice, but that she did not like the positive tie. She would have evaded the subject also, and said, “dear Maria, think of nothing that agitates you at this time.” She INSISTED that it did not agitate her, but that it was necessary for her repose to pursue the subject. Sally still evaded the promise, but said: “Oh! it is *impossible*.” Meaning that she cou’d *answer* for *herself*, but which Maria understood and construed into an impossibility of the event *ever* taking place, and replied: “I am content, my dear Sister—I am satisfied.”

. . . She desired to have Prayers read, and followed her angelic mother who read them, and who appear’d like a blessed spirit ministering about her, with the utmost clearness, accuracy and fervor. She then turn’d the conversation to *you* and said: “*That man* told you, Mother, he had destroy’d my Letters. I have no opinion of his honour, and I entreat you to demand them . . .” She then said Sally *had promised her* NEVER to think of an union with Mr. Lawrence, and appeal’d to her Sister to confirm it, who, quite overcome, reply’d: “I did *not* promise, dear dying Angel; but I WILL and do, if you require it.” “Thank you, Sally; my dear Mother—Mrs. Pennington—*bear witness*. Sally, give me your hand—you promise never to be his

wife ; Mother—Mrs. Pennington—lay your hands on hers” (we did so)—“ You understand ? bear witness.” We bowed and were speechless. “ Sally, sacred, sacred be this promise.” Stretching out her hand and pointing her forefinger—“ REMEMBER ME and God bless you ! ”

And what, after this, my friend, can you say to SALLY SIDDON? She has entreated me to give you this detail—to say that the impression is sacred, is indelible—that it cancels all former bonds and engagements—that she entreats you to submit and not to prophane this awful season by a murmur . . . *Yours* she NEVER *can*, never WILL be.

But Lawrence, who was not a religious man,<sup>1</sup> was too full of the desires of Life to bow before the sanctities of Death. It would hardly be fair to Mr. Knapp to copy here all of Lawrence’s reply to Mrs. Pennington, although it is only thirteen lines long. He accused all concerned of immeasurable deceit. Worst of all, he declared that if Mrs. Pennington should mention the scene at Maria’s death-bed to a single human being, he would pursue her name “with execration.” The lady, with excellent spirit, disdained his “unmanly threat,” and told him

<sup>1</sup> He went out of his way to vaunt his eating of beefsteaks on a fast-day.

that his further letters would be returned unopened. Further, she forwarded his "diabolical letter" for Mrs. Siddons' and Sally's perusal. Sally wrote back : "Do not fear upon my account, dearest friend ! Am I not bound by a promise the most solemn, the most sacred—is not that sufficient to preserve me, even should my own treacherous heart dictate a thought in his favour ? . . . I will not say that weakness shall never return ; but . . . whatever I may feel, I will act as I have promised."

Lawrence was penitent and persistent ; but Sally stood to her word. It was hard work. Over a year later she said it was her constant prayer to be kept aloof from "that being whose fascination I have not the power to escape should I be drawn within the circle of his magic." In short, after the way of the world, Lawrence was the first to be cured. Sally died in the spring of 1803. As Lawrence never married, Mrs. Siddons very slowly came to have a sort of reverent pride in the great man's supposed fidelity to her dead daughter ; and, in her extreme old age, she turned to her brother and said, "Charles, I wish to be borne to my grave by you and Lawrence."

But the facts seem to show that she did Lawrence a little too much honour. From the scandal concerning himself and the Princess of Wales in 1806, he was exculpated by the report of the famous "Delicate Investigation"; but Fanny Kemble, who herself felt Lawrence's fascination although he was forty years her senior, has expressly recorded the existence of a lady in significant weeds at the painter's funeral. And there were others.

Apart from its human interest, the foregoing account of Lawrence as a lover is worth giving because of its bearing upon his art. Although he painted some notable portraits of men, such as his *Pope Pius VII*, his *Cardinal Consalvi*, his *Prince Metternich*, his *Kemble as "Hamlet,"* his *Canning*, his *Castlereagh*, and his *Sir Walter Scott*, Lawrence made and keeps his reputation as a flatterer of women. He flattered them with his tongue, he flattered them with his pen, he flattered them with his crayons, he flattered them with his brush. There is a caressing, philandering touch in his portraits of women such as one could only get from a bachelor carpet-knight. He once told Fanny Kemble





how he had tried to paint a blush, "that most enchanting 'incident' in a woman's face." The famous Wagnerian conductor who testily told his 'cellists that they were "all playing like married men" would no doubt have been still more aghast at the unmarried fondness of Lawrence, which rings much more of sentimental calf-love than of grand passion. This quality, which rightly estranges many Englishmen from much of Lawrence's work, is probably one of the reasons why Frenchmen are attracted to it. To a Frenchman, Lawrence's gallery of portraits is a silken seraglio with an "adorable Eenglish Mees" on every divan. It is a French critic who has exulted in Lawrence's *façon de génie sensuel et lascif, qui anime d'une vie extraordinaire les aimables figures représentées*.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in our insular arrogance, some of us still suspect that we know more than any Frenchman about our native art and artists.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 3me Période, Tome V (1891), p. 133. "Mais ce n'est point pour la connaissance des personnages dont s'occupent les historiographes . . . que cet art de Lawrence est surtout précieux. Il vaut davantage encore à nous faire connaître et aimer ces adorables jeunes femmes dont à peine nous savons les noms, dont ainsi il nous est facile d'imaginer à notre guise le tempérament et l'histoire. A ce point de vue, aucun peintre n'est comparable à Lawrence. Aucun ne suggère comme lui

Outside the affair of Sally, all Lawrence's concerns prospered. Even the "Delicate Investigation" did him more good than harm in the long run. When Hoppner died, in 1810, Lawrence reigned without a rival as a portrait-painter. Honours were heaped upon him. In 1814 he was called home from Paris, whither he had gone to see Napoleon's loot of pictures, to paint the Allied Sovereigns and their ministers. Two years later he was despatched to Aix-la-Chapelle to complete the same task. The Government paid him £1000 for his expenses and sent out for his accommodation a portable wooden house with a painting-room. At Aix, kings and queens, princes and field-m Marshals, chancellors and ambassadors were as plentiful as blackberries, and Lawrence not only made £20,000 in a single year but was half buried under jewelled snuff-boxes, medals, and other glittering souvenirs. From Aix he continued his triumphal progress to Vienna and Rome. After so many pomps he found Rome at first "small."

un monde d'exquises imaginations, de respectueuses passions, intellectuelles, de conversations idéales. Ses modèles féminins prennent dans ses tableaux une vie si charmante et si familière que pas un moment le respect dû aux œuvres d'art ne nous empêche de les adorer."

But the Pope housed him magnificently in the Quirinal Palace, and he gradually came to feel the grandeur of the Eternal City. He saw the Vatican pictures, and agreed with Reynolds that Michelangelo was superior to Raphael. At Naples old Vesuvius showed a proper respect for its distinguished visitor by glowing beautifully at night.

Only two academicians dissenting, Lawrence was elected President of the Royal Academy in 1820. He continued to draw vast sums of money, but was always in debt. It has been ungenerously hinted that the gaming-tables accounted for his chronic impecuniosity: but it is much more certainly known that he was generous to his servants and the poor. Again, a great deal of money went in purchasing the splendid collection of old masters which, following Reynolds' example, he industriously gathered together. This collection, most lamentably, was dispersed all over Europe at his death. Happily Oxford University possesses many of Lawrence's best Michelangelo and Raphael drawings, but ever so many other treasures were lost to this country altogether.

Towards the end of his life Lawrence turned, with evident sincerity, to religion, and began to find satisfaction in pious reading and godly company. Possibly it was this change which made Mrs. Siddons—herself something of a saint—condone his behaviour of thirty years before. Towards the end of 1830 he fell ill, and there seems to have been gross carelessness in the way the leeches were applied. On January 5, 1831, while a book was being read aloud, a pain smote him, and he said to his servant, "John, my good fellow, this is dying." John replied, "Oh no, Sir, it is only fainting." But his master's magnificently brave words were true. It was the end.

Lawrence's funeral was a remarkable pageant of mourning. But, when his estate was wound up, barely anything remained for his heirs. His fame, like Romney's, at once began to wane, but is waxing once more. And certainly Sir Thomas Lawrence deserves to be held in honourable remembrance. Nearly everything that is dislikeable, both in his character as a man and his work as an artist, can be explained by his unfortunate boyhood. The marvel is that he did not become a wholly selfish man and an



entirely objectionable painter. Of the eight artists discussed in this book he stands eighth in merit. But he did work that will live. His *Lady Peel*; his *Master Lambton*; his *King of Rome*, and other delicious paintings of childhood; and, above all, his extremely beautiful drawings of heads, have rich artistic worth as well as deep human interest. Nor must we ever weaken in gratitude to the man who, despite the effeminacy of his own art, enriched England with the drawings of Michelangelo and pleaded the cause of the Elgin Marbles.

# TURNER

(1775-1851)

**S**PEAKING of Wordsworth, Mr. Julian Hill, in his "Great English Poets," says: "As if to seal him with the Great Seal of the kings of English poetry, Death took him on April 23—the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and of Shakespeare's death." Of course April 23 is also the feast of St. George, patron of England. But these coincidences do not exhaust the glories of April 23, for it was upon this birthday and death-day of Shakespeare that Turner—"the Shakespeare of landscape" as Tennyson called him—was born.<sup>1</sup> No great nation has been more negligent than England of its patron-saint: but St. George has certainly said *Adsum* to the faithful

<sup>1</sup> His biographers have written uncertainly on the point: but Turner himself seems to have settled the matter by his bequest of £50 a year to the Royal Academicians "for a dinner on his birthday, April 23."



few who have invoked him with the old prayer of *Adsit pro Anglia*.

Turner's birth is said to have taken place in the year 1775. In later life he used to mystify his acquaintances by saying that he was a much older man than was commonly supposed: but 1775 appears to be the true date. Concerning his birthplace and parentage there is less dispute. Joseph Mallord William Turner, the painter of gods and heroes, was the son of a small barber; and the first home of this seer of temples and castles, cathedrals and abbeys, ice-peaks and thundering cascades, Venetian lagoons and the ensanguined seas of Trafalgar, was the house over (some say a cellar under) the barber's shop. To be exact, it was No. 26 Maiden Lane, at the corner of Hand's Court, Covent Garden. In his days, as in ours, Covent Garden was London's chief mart of fruit and flowers. Ruskin, who said some of the right things about Turner in the wrong way, made an excellently neat remark on Turner's indebtedness to Covent Garden. "His foregrounds," said Ruskin, "have always a succulent cluster or two of greengrocery in the corners. Enchanted oranges gleam in Covent

Gardens of the Hesperides and great ships go to pieces to scatter chests of them on the waves."

In addition to the shapely and gaudy wealth of Covent Garden, the child Turner was blessed with another brave daily show which never ceased to colour his mind. Two minutes' scampering would take him to the marge of the Thames. And in Turner's time the Thames was a sight to see. Even to-day, with its few good and many bad bridges, it is one of the haunts best worth a poetical painter's while. But, when Turner was a child, its noble curve swept free. To-day it is cut into compartments by the straight lines of bridges and embankments. Again, in Turner's time, it was a living highway of traffic. Stout watermen rowed nobles and burgesses hither and thither, while all shapes and colours of sailing-craft cast or weighed their anchors, or churned a purposeful way through the bronze water.

A barber's shop in Maiden Lane suggests to the twentieth-century mind a narrow den where the client's choice is between a threepenny "hair-cut" or a twopenny shave. But Turner's father, living in a wig-wearing and hair-torturing age, was something better than a mere scraper and

clipper. High business sometimes took him to his customers' houses, and his son occasionally went with him. Having seen a lion engraved on a piece of plate, he returned home and made a recognisable copy of the little beast on paper. His father was impressed. Barbers are neither deaf nor dumb ; and no doubt Mr. Turner had heard more than a little talk among his clients concerning the showers of guineas which descended upon Reynolds, Gainsborough, Romney and the other fashionable portrait-takers of the day. Therefore, when customers in want of something to say, asked what the boy was going to be, he would answer proudly, "William is going to be a painter."

When he was ten years old—the age at which Lawrence began to support his family—Joseph William was sent to Brentford. Nowadays, the man who boards one of the electric tram-cars which have ruined Pope's and Kneller's and Turner's Twickenham, will find it hard to believe that George the First used to have his chariot go slowly through Brentford because it reminded him of Hanover. But behind the gas-works and cheap and nasty shops of the tram-route

there still exist the charming, old-world Butts where Turner's school-days were spent. Nor have the rare beauties of the Brent Valley entirely disappeared. The pilgrim who wanders in this region must feel that the lad Turner did, after all, have a chance. Best of all, his beloved Thames ran even nearer to the Butts than to the barber's shop in Maiden Lane.

Joseph William's first patron held the position of foreman at the Brentford distillery. From this proud height his hand lavished bounty upon the little artist. On an average the foreman paid him fourpence apiece for colouring about a hundred and forty engravings by hand. A little later the schoolboy's works were on sale at the Maiden Lane shop for a shilling each. That they were worth every penny of the price will be admitted by any one who has seen *Folly Bridge* in the water-colour rooms of the National Gallery. *Folly Bridge*, a shaded pencil-drawing touched with colour, is dated 1787, which means that when Turner drew it he was only twelve years old.

At fourteen the boy set out for his second school. It was at Margate, where he was able to

gaze his fill at the open sea and the big ships. A year later his artistic training began in earnest. At fifteen he was an exhibitor in the Royal Academy, and at eighteen he had finished the accomplished and very beautiful Tintern Abbey, now at South Kensington. An architectural draughtsman was his first serious drawing-master, and it was therefore natural that Turner should shine first in architectural subjects. Besides, there was money to be made by such work. Although landscape painting, pure and simple, was still an English artist's road to starvation, a demand was growing up for topographical engravings. While Reynolds, Romney, Lawrence, Hoppner, and the others were painting thousands of faces, less favoured but still prosperous artists were drawing and engraving hundreds of castles, abbeys, and, above all, country seats. Thus, while the less famous men were picturing the stately homes of England, their more renowned brethren were portraying the noble owners and their grand dames. Work of this kind soon came Turner's way. He was sent into Yorkshire, where, in addition to many other drawings, he executed his *Kirkstall Abbey*.

When the writer of this book made a pilgrimage to Kirkstall Abbey he found it turned into a public recreation ground. There was orange-peel in an abbot's tomb, and children were romping on the site of the old Holy of Holies. But in Turner's time the ruin was mouldering softly beside the Aire, which before its pollution was a beautiful stream. Ruskin maintained that Kirkstall Abbey first wooed Turner from the study of man-made architecture to the study of God's world of nature. This may just possibly be true. But Ruskin went on to error. Himself unable to practise his own art as a literary man without perpetual preaching, he assumed that there must be some message or moral in the art of the painter Turner. Turner, he said, taught the littleness of man's perishable works amidst the grandeur of abiding Nature. "As the strength of man to Giorgione," said Ruskin, so "to Turner his weakness and his vileness." Again: "In the Venetian's eyes all beauty depended upon man's presence and his pride. In Turner's, on the solitude he had left and the humiliation he had endured." But this is quite too literary. In preferring a richly crumbling

and greenly mantled ruin to the hard planes and angles and outlines of a naked modern building, a painter is inspired æsthetically rather than didactically or even reflectively. Non-natural straight lines are abhorrent to the painter ; and, to this extent, Hogarth with his "line of beauty and of grace" taught a prime truth of art.

For many years after the so-called crisis of his visit to Kirkstall, Turner went on making architectural drawings with obvious heartiness. His *Lady Chapel of Salisbury Cathedral*, his *Holy Island*, and, most wonderful of all, his *Ely Cathedral* prove that the mutable works of petty man had not become acutely painful to a pair of eyes which had not been privileged with a sight of the volumes of "Modern Painters." Meanwhile a factor was at work in his artistic education of more worth than all his academic tutors put together. At the print shop of John Raphael Smith, where he was occasionally employed colouring prints, he had made the acquaintance of young Thomas Girtin, another print-colourer. "Poor Tom," as Turner called him in after life, died at the age of twenty-seven, but he worked long enough to show that he had it in

him to equal the very greatest of English artists. Along with Girtin, Turner often visited Dr. Munro, the art-loving physician who ministered to George the Third in his madness. "Many and many a time," said Turner afterwards, "did Girtin and I walk over in the evening to Bushey to copy Dr. Munro's valuable prints and to get half a crown each for our work, and our supper besides." At Dr. Munro's London house in Adelphi Terrace, looking over the Thames, the two youths often met De Wint, Cozens, and other excellent artists who did much to establish our noble schools of English landscape. But Turner came to see that Girtin was the greatest of them all: for he said in older age, "If poor Tom had lived, I should have starved."

Having done well in Yorkshire, Turner ranged through Scotland and Wales. It was part of the bargain with his employers that he should be paid his travelling expenses. One hears it currently reported that twentieth-century commercial travellers receive a pound a day; but Turner, a mere artist, took himself less seriously. For example, his travelling bills in Scotland totalled only about fifteen pounds;



and when the employer started at the smallness of the amount, Turner indignantly challenged him to do it himself for less.

Under the impulsion of some fine Vandeveldts—for Turner's originality generally needed to be stirred up by the sight of a predecessor's or rival's efforts—Turner, in 1796-8, painted for the Royal Academy's exhibition, *Fishermen going out to Sea*, *Fishermen going Ashore (Sunset)*, and *Fishermen becalmed (Twilight)*. The wise saw that these were no ordinary performances; and when in 1799 they were followed by the water-colour *Norham Castle, on the Tweed*, his triumph was so complete that he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. In this characteristic work, the hill-perched castle is almost centred in the picture, with the setting sun burning behind its dark mass and its own shadow bulking in the water below. Long afterwards, when passing the castle, Turner was observed offering it a profound obeisance; and he explained to an inquisitive companion that he did so because Norham Castle had brought him his first distinct success, and that never afterwards had he lacked either work or money.

As the new Associate of the Royal Academy was just twenty-four years old, the experienced reader will expect to encounter hereabouts a paragraph or two concerning Turner's love, courtship, and marriage. The little there is to write makes sad reading. As a lad at Margate he seems to have cast shy eyes upon the sister of a schoolfellow. Margate and its inhabitants always held warm corners in Turner's inscrutable heart—indeed, Ruskin complained that Turner painted Margate too often and too punctiliously—and as soon as his prospects justified the course he repaired thither and won the maiden's consent. But there was a wicked stepmother in the case. The carefulness of the young painter in money matters often looked uncomfortably like downright meanness, and on this and other grounds the stepmother disliked the match. In order to frustrate it she used contemptible tactics. Turner, immediately after the betrothal, departed on one of his professional sketching-tours, probably in France, and all the letters he wrote to his lady were intercepted. Having no addresses to which she could write, the poor girl perforce remained silent. Mean-

while the stepmother, by harping daily on the unfaithfulness of man in general and of Turner in particular, was steadily advancing her own plan of marrying her stepdaughter to a man of means. The younger woman did not live happily with the elder; and when she became unwillingly convinced that her lover had deserted her she fell in with her stepmother's plans. Turner appeared just before the wedding; but although the bride confessed that her heart was still his, her head forbade her to withdraw her hand from the second suitor. Her marriage, as might have been expected, turned out unhappily. As for Turner, he remained a bachelor and became so indifferent a ladies' man that before he was thirty-four he appeared to an eye-witness as "the very moral of a master-carpenter, with lobster-red face, twinkling, staring grey eyes, white tie, blue coat with brass buttons, crabshell turned-up boots, large fluffy hat, and enormous umbrella."

His loss was our gain. From the hour of his disappointment Turner lived for art alone. He had his lapses into low pleasures, and, towards the end of his life, he drank more than was good

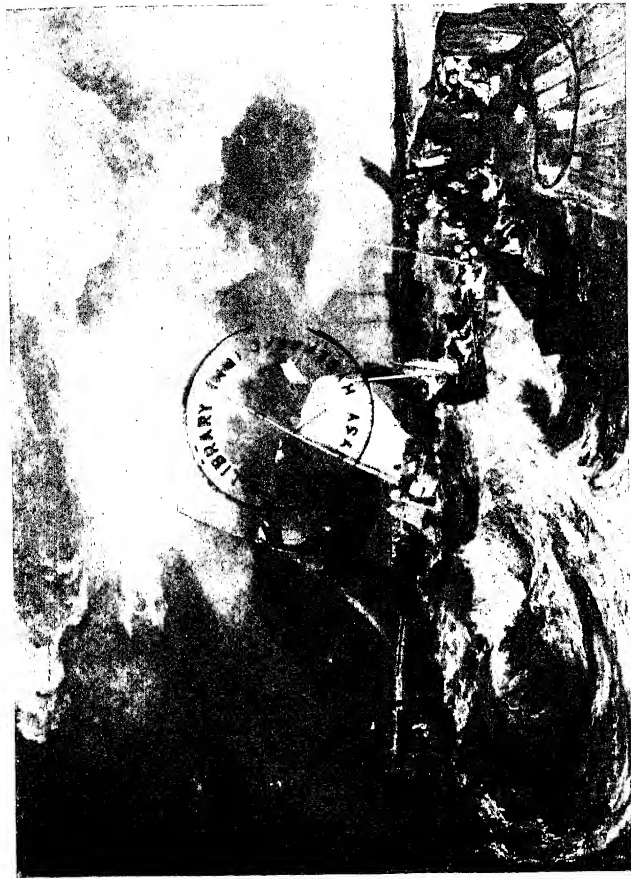
for him : but, broadly speaking, his days were work, work, work. Following Girtin, he increased the flexibility of water-colour drawing to such a point that his work could fairly be called water-colour painting. Indeed, from a simply technical standpoint, Turner wrought much more satisfactorily in water-colours than in oils. Making all due allowance for the gnawings and corrodings of the London atmosphere, his oil-paintings, like those of Reynolds, have lost their bloom too young. This is apparent to everybody who has seen the Turners in the Tate Gallery, which have had to endure over fifty years' less exposure than their fellows in the rooms at Trafalgar Square.

By 1802 Turner had taken the great stride. He had "painted a Turner." This was his *Kilburn Castle*. To a certain extent *Norham Castle* and other pieces were also "Turners," but they were commixed with elements derived from Wilson, from Girtin, from Hearne, from Vandeveldt. But *Kilburn Castle*, in the sound phrase of Hamerton, was "a Turner and nothing but a Turner." The style of a great man is as pronounced as the mannerism of a little one : and, when Turner fairly found himself, he produced

works as immediately recognisable as are the anæmic ladies of Burne-Jones. It goes far to establish the immortal greatness of Turner that a work from his mature brush always cries out "I am a Turner," as promptly and unanswerably as a ripe work of Rembrandt cries out "I am a Rembrandt," or as a masterpiece of Velasquez or of Constable boasts forth its father's name. Nor were Turner's contemporaries blind to his merit. Later on, he furnished a handy peg on which small wits could hang old jokes about his pictures looking better upside down : but, in his young days, when he needed applause he received it. *Kilburn Castle* led to his being made a Royal Academician. The year of his receiving this honour was also the year of poor Girtin's death, and thenceforward Turner seems to have been more than ever determined to take the first place among English artists. More. He seems to have resolved to outshine and outsoar not only his compatriots and contemporaries but all his predecessors, of every race, in his chosen field of poetic landscape. Here was a grand ambition : but there are many calm judges who believe that Turner attained it.

This imperious resolve to brook no rivalry led the painter into strange doings and sayings. In choosing or tolerating a companion on a sketching-tour, he generally stipulated that his fellow-artist should never sketch the scenes which engaged Turner's own pencil. On varnishing days at the Royal Academy he would not suffer any neighbouring canvas to bid louder for applause than his own. When he found the next picture's red more vivid than his, he would lift a knifeful of paint from another artist's palette and bring his own work up to a sharper pitch. To learn from fellow-painters he was so persistent that the wife of De Louthembourg once shut the door in his face, on the ground that he had picked her husband's brains excessively: yet he would never suffer anybody to study his own methods or to see him at work. He took tuition-fees from pupils, and then let them go their own way, saying that he didn't see why he should sell guinea secrets for five shillings each.

Jealous and suspicious of the living, Turner could not forbear to challenge the dead. Perceiving the greatness of Claude, he set himself to transcend it. He bequeathed his *Sun rising*



CALAIS PIER

By

J. M. W. TURNER

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

*in a Mist* and his *Dido building Carthage* to the nation on condition that they should be hung between two Claudes. His *Liber Studiorum* was a deliberate retort to Claude's casual *Liber Veritatis*. As for Vandeveldt, Turner's *Dutch Boats in a Gale* was painted to prove that he could make waves roll and spray sparkle and clouds lower and winds blow as well as any Hollander. Again, when in mature age Turner first saw Venice and its treasures, he challenged the fame of the Venetian colourists with those glowing masterpieces painted on a white ground, of which homely John Constable said: "They are golden visions—only visions, but still one would like to live and die with such pictures."

Regarding the public as "a pack of geese," Turner was not above assisting them to appreciate his performances. It is said that he came upon a group of people at the Royal Academy standing before his 1803 *Calais Pier*, and that, pointing to the fish, he exclaimed, "And they say Turner can't colour." This sensitiveness to a public opinion which he affected to despise also led him to waste time on toil which was not proper to his genius. For instance, when young



David Wilkie scored a success with his *Village Politicians*, Turner rushed into the arena with his *Blacksmith's Shop*, making the fires of the forge so bright that Wilkie's less lurid performance was made to appear tame. As Wilkie at this time was poor and still in his 'teens, Turner's act does not look handsome; and it looks unhandsomer still when one contrasts it with the painter's treatment of the wealthy and famous Lawrence. Finding that his glowing *Cologne: the Packet Boat arriving* dulled Lawrence's pictures hanging beside it he went over *Cologne* with lamp-black, saying, "It will all wash off, and Lawrence was so unhappy." But it is fair to add that, in old age, he repented nobly towards Wilkie. His *Peace: Burial at Sea*, painted in 1842, represents the obsequies of Sir David Wilkie off Gibraltar. Turner himself wrote the lines inscribed under the picture :

The midnight torch gleamed o'er the steamer's side,  
And merit's corse was yielded to the tide.

And when he was reproached with the blackness of the funeral sails, he said, "If I could find anything blacker than black I'd use it."

In grand labours and small jealousies, beautiful visions and sordid delights, Turner's motley life marched on. His income was ample, and, for the sake of appearances, he rented a house in a good quarter, but he lived frugally, and rarely entertained a guest of social importance. His compositions for such publications as the *Southern Coast Scenery*, *The Rivers of England*, *The Rivers of Devon*, and *The Rivers of France* required frequent and long absences from London, and his parsimoniousness as a traveller hardened him into habits which were incompatible with social popularity. But underneath the roughness there was a man's heart. To his father, who had suffered from the decline and fall of high hair-dressing, the painter was more than dutiful. Mainly for the old man's benefit, Turner set up housekeeping at Sandycombe Lodge, Twickenham, between Pope's Villa and Richmond Hill.

Sandycombe Lodge was a temple of the simple life. Old Turner, a thin, sharp-eyed, quick-handed man, did not lag behind his offspring in thriftiness. To save the fare to London, where he still had the care of a wig or two, he would

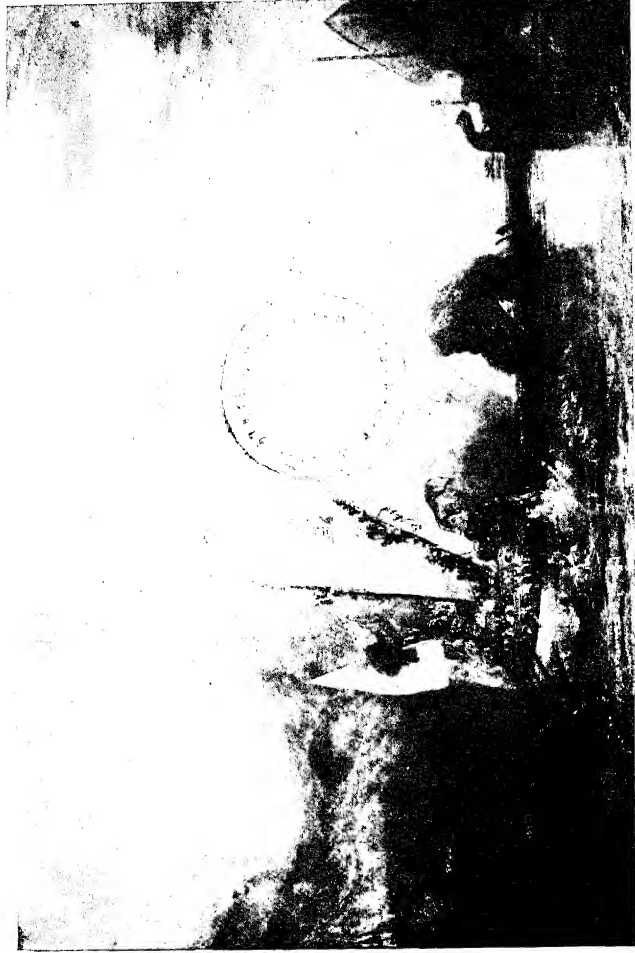
ride on the market-gardeners' carts, perilously poised atop of the vegetables. His provisions he brought from a distant but cheaper market ; and once a week the folk of Twickenham could see him trudging home with his purchases tied up in a blue handkerchief. As Turner had a fondness for very long titles under his pictures, one might have suggested that he should execute a Morlandian work with the subscription, *Coming Home from Market : Turnip-carts, with the Father of the Painter of "Hannibal and his Army crossing the Alps," "Apollo killing the Python," "Jason in search of the Golden Fleece," "The Garden of the Hesperides," and "Dido and Æneas leaving Carthage on the Morning of the Chase."* Within the Lodge itself equal frugality reigned. The table was of deal, sparsely covered with a coarse cloth, the knives had horn handles, the forks were two-pronged, the drink was drunk from mugs, and the service consisted in jumping up for what you wanted and getting it yourself. Nevertheless, the two men were happy. They had a boat for fishing and sketching, as well as an ancient pony and chaise. A neighbour or two relieved the monotony, and with the family

of one of them, Mr. Trimmer, Turner would unbend almost to merriment. Mr. Trimmer was vicar of Heston : and tradition asserts that if Miss Trimmer had proposed marriage to Turner (there was a leap year during their acquaintanceship) he would have been graciously pleased to accept her. But she failed to do so, and Turner's own shyness was too great for him to make a move. Yet there were many chances : for Miss Trimmer's reverend papa was teaching Turner a little futile Greek in exchange for some almost equally futile painting.

The narrow limits of this volume exclude a full account of the inestimable *Liber Studiorum*, which was begun in 1807. This work was abandoned when it was only three-fourths done, but enough was accomplished to make the *Liber* one of the grandest monuments in the world to the genius of a single artist. The engravings which compose it are exciting game for collectors to track and chase, because Turner would sometimes alter the plate materially after the first batch of impressions had been printed off. The National Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, and the National

Gallery of Ireland possess fine sets (not hung) of the work, which can be seen by anybody who will take the trouble to ask for them, and there are also adequate photographic reproductions. Of course, Turner's *Liber* out-Claudes Claude, if only for the reason that the *Liber Veritatis* is a collection of slight sketches, while the *Liber Studiorum* is a full-dress exposition of landscape-drawing in complete chiaroscuro.

The year after his *Liber* was taken in hand Turner became professor of perspective at the Royal Academy. But he could practise art much better than he could preach it, and his discourses were not good. Yet, although a sufficient supply of the right words would never obey his tongue's or his pen's command, Turner fancied himself strangely as a poet and man of letters. For nearly forty years he busied himself by fits and starts with *The Fallacies of Hope*. The merits of this production may be inferred from the following extract, which, like most of the other "Fallacies," was put forward as a sort of an explanation of Turner's *Hannibal crossing the Alps*.



ULYSSES DERIDING POLYPHEMUS

By

J. M. W. TURNER

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

Craft, treachery and fraud—Salassian force,  
Hung on the fainting rear ! Then Plunder seiz'd  
The victor and the captive—Saguntum's spoil  
Alike became their prey ; still the chief advanc'd,  
Look'd on the sun with hope ;—low, broad and wan,  
While the fierce archer of the downward year  
Stains Italy's blanch'd barrier with storms.  
In vain each pass, ensanguin'd deep with dead,  
Or rocky fragments, wide destruction roll'd.  
Still on Campania's fertile plains—he thought,  
But the loud breeze sob'd, "Capua's joys beware !"

There are Turnerian touches in the fifth and sixth lines of this dark utterance ; but never again did Turner soar to an equal height of poetry.

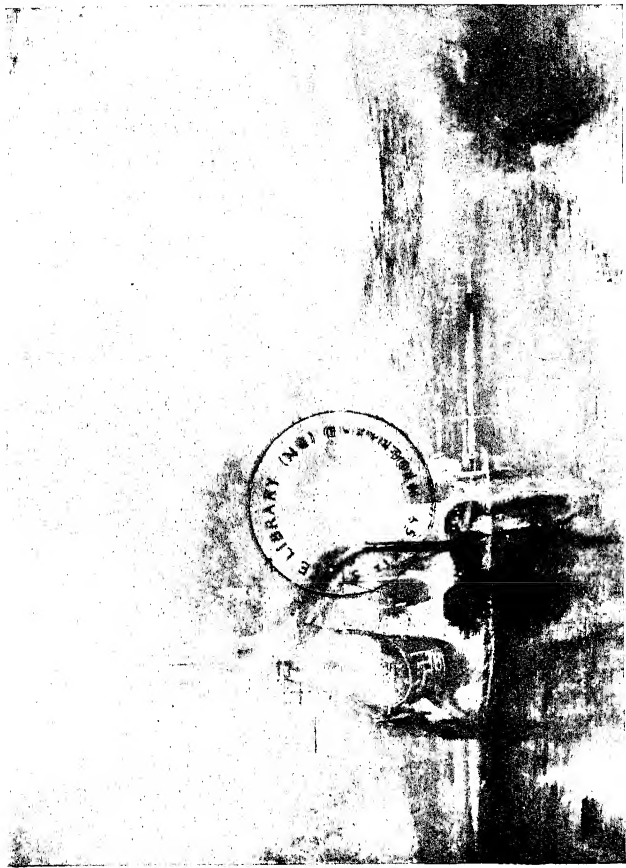
Not until he was forty-five years old did our English Venetian visit Italy. Jumbling together his small French and less Italian, he contrived to reach Rome. On the way he fell in with an Irish student, and the two stuck together ; but they had been fellow-travellers for months before either of the eccentric pair asked the other his name.

Although Turner's drawings on his return to England showed more brilliancy of colour and a less heavy touch, two or three years passed before the public were allowed to see what Italy

had done for him as a painter. In 1823 he exhibited the *Bay of Baïæ, with Apollo and the Sibyl*, a masterpiece whose still glorious ruins are preserved in the National Gallery. Beautiful even in decay, it makes a painter feel that he would give six months of his life to have seen it in its primal grandeur. Soon after *Baïæ* came the *Cologne*, already mentioned. His *England and Wales* series, so sought of collectors, interrupted his painting; but at the end of 1828 he went to Rome for a second time, and returned to paint his most Turnerish Turners, including *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Ulysses deriding Polyphemus*, an even greater picture than the later and more popular *Fighting Teméraire tugged to her Last Berth*.

Old Mr. Turner died on Michaelmas Day, 1829. Turner's mother had died insane some time before. With so little to hold him in London, he gave himself up to perpetual motion. Probably he went more than once to Holland, and, in revisiting Scotland to illustrate Scott's poems, he was nearly lost in the Isle of Skye. But about 1832 Turner's great hour struck. He saw Venice. How deeply his first





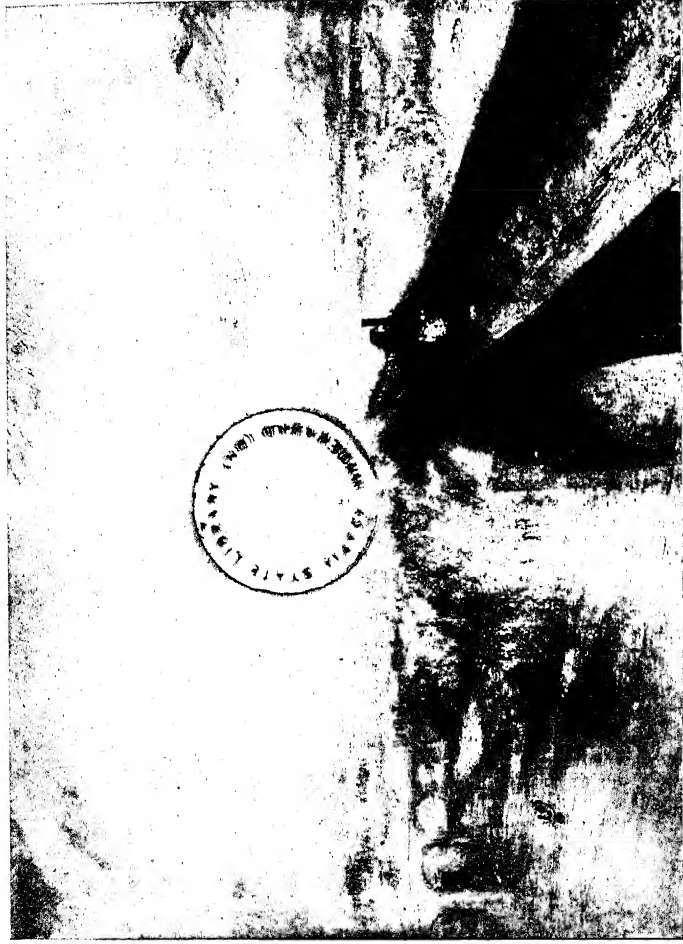
THE FIGHTING TÉMÉRAIRE TUGGED TO HER LAST BERTH

By  
J. M. W. TURNER

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

sight of it must have moved him appears from the fact that *The Approach to Venice* is the finest of all the very fine Venetian pictures which occupied so much of his energy during the twelve years ensuing upon his sojourn in the city. This wonder is in private hands; but the National Gallery has *The "Sun of Venice" going to Sea*, and many more Venetian Turners, including a number of water-colours. The Venetian splendours overflowed into other productions of Turner which portray non-Venetian subjects, such as *The Golden Bough*. At the same time Turner was at the apex of his power in poetically rendering English scenes. If the Victoria and Albert Museum were in the heart of Morocco instead of in South Kensington, a painter would be repaid for the pains and perils of his going thither by two of the Sheepshanks Turners alone—the *St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall* (1834), and the *Line-fishing off Hastings* (1835). As for the National Gallery *Fighting Téméraire* (1839), there is no need to praise a work which hangs on a hundred thousand English walls and is engraved on a million English hearts.

Ruskin believed that after achieving the *Fighting Téméraire* Turner himself began to be tugged to his last berth, and that his power began to decline. Seeing that *The Approach to Venice* came four years after the *Fighting Téméraire*, his dictum is doubtful. But the critics of the 'forties agreed with Ruskin, and the wits began to make a butt of him. They called his *Snowstorm* (1842) "soapsuds and whitewash." Yet the history of this picture should make even the cheapest buffoon in the world take off his hat to Turner. In his love of nature—a love which, as the late Cosmo Monkhouse truly said, was more intense than even his love of fame and his love of money—the old man of nearly three-score years and ten caused himself to be lashed for four hours to the mast of the Margate steamer *Ariel*, in order that he might study the storm at its heart. To Charles Kingsley he said, "I did not expect to escape; but I felt bound to record it if I did." And to Ruskin he said, "Soapsuds and whitewash! What would they have? I wonder what they think the sea's like? I wish they had been in it." These things are worth remembering by



RAIN, STEAM, AND SPEED : GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY

By

J. M. W. TURNER

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

those who have walked past the National Gallery *Rain, Steam, and Speed* with patronising pity for this supposed freak of a once great painter sinking into senile decay. No doubt decay did set in before Turner laid his brushes aside, but the symptoms of it are not to be found in his *Deluge* pictures and in his *Whalers*. Like well-hung game-birds, the Turners of the *Rain, Steam, and Speed* class strike the general public as rife with decay, but to the artistic gourmet they are alluringly mature. Perhaps it would be flippant to call them "high" art: but, in the French sense, these are the high Turners.

After his father's death Turner lived mysteriously. His house in Queen Anne Street was bolted, chained, locked, and barred, and the housekeeper stoutly repelled prying callers. The artist did not exhibit all his new works, and there were fine things at Queen Anne Street which no pair of eyes save his own had seen. In little affairs he was as mean as ever, haggling over cab fares and over the difference between pounds and guineas. But in big things he rose above money. More than once he refused

scores of thousands of pounds for the pictures in the Queen Anne Street house, because he was determined to bequeath them to the nation.

Nearly all this time he was living a double life. He had fallen in at Margate with a congenial landlady named Caroline Sophia Booth, an illiterate but pleasant woman of dark complexion. How far she stood to him in the relation of Mrs. Turner is not positively known, but it is said that, on learning her name, he exclaimed, "Then I'll be Mr. Booth." And "Mr. Booth" he became. One day his fancy was captured by a cottage at Chelsea, with a verandah overlooking the river; and, in company with Mrs. Booth, he approached the landlord as a would-be tenant. The landlord naturally required the applicants' names, together with references, but this did not suit Mr. "Booth," who secured the place at last by paying the rent in advance. Mistaking his roughness for that of a retired sea-captain, the Chelsea people nicknamed their new neighbour "Admiral Booth," while the gamins knew him less respectfully as "Puggy Booth." Turner was entirely successful in concealing his false name and his secret

haunt from his friends. Should any one put him in a cab and demand his instructions for the driver, he would answer, "order him to drive to Oxford Street, and then I'll tell him where to go." Even at the photographer's he concealed his identity, describing himself as a master in chancery. Yet he was willing enough to disclose his true name when the case demanded it, as when he said angrily "I am Turner. . . . I did it" to Halstead, a print-seller, who was disputing his shabby customer's right to hold an opinion about a soiled plate from the *Liber Studiorum*. What followed is worth telling. Halstead, after confessing that he had often wanted to see the great Mr. Turner, added, "But I don't want to set eyes on him again, for a more disagreeable fellow I never met in my life." Turner left the shop in wrath, but he darted back almost immediately, thrust his head through the doorway, and cried, "Halstead, God bless you !"

On the death of Sir Martin Shee, Romney's successor in Cavendish Square, Turner counted on being elected President of the Royal Academy. He was not elected ; and he did not exhibit at the Academy again. Shee died in 1850. To-

wards the end of 1851 Turner's visits to Queen Anne Street, always infrequent, ceased. His housekeeper at last grew anxious, and found a partial clue in an old letter in one of her master's pockets. Inquiring at one little Chelsea shop after another, she traced the great painter to his little retreat, but not until he had begun the last twenty-four hours of his life. When he knew that the end was come, he asked that his couch might be wheeled to the window. It was a beautiful night, a week before Christmas, and gazing upon the living waters of the Thames, with his head on Mrs. Booth's shoulder, he died.

At his own desire, Turner was buried beside Sir Joshua Reynolds in the crypt of St. Paul's. But in too many other respects the dead man's wishes were ignored. He willed £60,000 for the founding of an asylum for poor and old artists at Twickenham, but this clause of his testament, as well as others, was set aside on the plea of the next-of-kin. Although the will was clear enough for straightforward interpreters, perhaps the Court of Chancery was bound to uphold certain technical objections ; but nothing



can justify the British nation's disregard of the conditions attached to the bequest of pictures which it has accepted. As these treasures include 362 paintings, 135 finished water-colours, 1757 studies in colour, and nearly 17,000 sketches, only a fraction can be shown : but now that the five additional rooms of the National Gallery are nearing completion, it is time for the resurrection of many an unknown "Turner" from the tin boxes in the cellars.

Turner ranks with Chaucer and Shakespeare, Wellington and Nelson among the glories of England. His work is almost creative, like a god's. He adds mind to matter, spirit to sense, man to nature. His visions are true, with a truth which transcends the beggarly elements of common fact. To a lady's, "But I never see such sunsets," he is said to have replied, "Don't you wish, madam, that you did?" His art is nothing but nature—nature raised to a higher power. And this is the same as saying that the painter Turner was a supreme poet.

Just as a near mound can shut off from our eyes a far mountain, so Ruskin, with his literary expositions of an imaginary, ethical Turner, has

hidden the best of this towering man from our sight. And, unhappily, certain writers on art, in their recoil from Ruskinism, have uncritically recoiled at the same time from Turner as Ruskin's man. But if Ruskin had never been born, or had never lived to cut a quill, Turner would have been the same painter. Every year Ruskin's mound recedes and dwindles ; and every year Turner's mountain comes more hugely into view. He is a mountain indeed—an exceeding high mountain. His roots are deep in the resounding sea ; his flanks are rich with pastures for a thousand flocks, with wind-bowed forests for strange beasts, with castles and palaces for beautiful women and strong men ; his torrents flash and thunder in the sunset ; his dawn-reddened snows are blent with glorious heaven.

## CONSTABLE

(1776-1837)

**P**AINTING has both its poetry and its prose ; and in painting, as in literature, the prose may be almost as noble and satisfying as the poetry. Of course the word prose—which is too often confounded with prosiness—is here used in its better sense, and therefore no sneer is intended in saying that Constable, in contrast with the poet Turner, was a prose-artist. Turner saw his faërie world by the light that never was on sea or land ; but Constable's useful cornfields swayed for him in the light of common day. To pass from Turner to Constable is like awaking from golden and rosy dreams and to see through the wide-open window a goodly English meadow girt with leafy elms. As one returns to consciousness, one feels a pang at the crumbling down of the dream-palaces and the fading away of the dream-gardens ; and yet, as the thousand thou-

sand brilliants of the dew flash amid the gold of the buttercups, one's spirit leaps up like the lark, and one is not sure that the good, solid, sun-bright world of reality is poorer than the dream-world after all.

When John Constable was born, on June 11, 1776, he was so unpromising an infant that he was christened before he was half a day old. Far from foreseeing that he would make a mark in the world, his parents expected him to hurry straight out of it. But he was tougher than he seemed. Quickly becoming a strong and healthy child, he was able to receive his Latin verbs and his frequent floggings like any other British boy of the time. He went to good schools, for Golding Constable, his father, was a substantial man who owned two water-mills and two wind-mills, as well as the roomy red-brick house at East Bergholt, the Suffolk village in which John was born.

Of Golding Constable a pleasant anecdote survives. He wished to transfer a bargee from one cottage to another ; but, for a long time, the man would neither remove nor give any reason whatever for sticking so obstinately to the old

home. When, at last, the bargee broke silence, he said, "If I leave this cottage I shall never be able to shave again!" It turned out that, for many years, the Sunday razor-sharpening had been performed on the top step, and that the cottager despaired of finding such a home anywhere else in the parish. "If that is all," said Golding Constable, "the carpenter shall take up the step for you to carry away, and the stairs too if you want them." It is also related of this good man that he desired, on his death-bed, to make reparation to any poor person or widow or orphan of whose necessities he might have taken advantage in the course of his business life; but the older mill-clerk ransacked his crowded memory in vain to recall a single instance of imperfect justice.

The picturesque tradition to the effect that Rembrandt owed his distinctive chiaroscuro to a childhood passed in the dim interior of a mill may or may not be true. But it is certain that the miller's son of East Bergholt never lost his early impressions. Of the windmills which John Constable painted in later life, his brother said: "They will *go round*, which is not always the case

with those painted by other artists." And of one of his pictures of mills, David Lucas, the engraver, expressly said :—

It was done to explain the altered shape of the vanes in their different positions, for Mr. Constable pointed out that, as the generality of artists represented them, they would never turn round at all, whereas, if correctly done, a miller could tell not only what they were doing inside, but the direction and force of the wind blowing at that time.

As for the two water-mills at Flatford and Dedham, they seized the child's mind still more powerfully. Nearly everybody who knows Constable at all, knows his *Flatford Mill* in the National Gallery, and the alternative title of the wonderful *Leaping Horse* is *Dedham Lock*. When he was a man of five-and-forty, Constable, in a letter to a friend, wrote : "The sound of water escaping from mill-dams, etc.; willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts and brickwork—I love such things."

Young John, however, was expected by his parents to be interested in mill-sails and mill-wheels more as useful than as ornamental objects. At Dedham, where he attended the

Grammar School, he had become the chum of a superior plumber and glazier named John Dunthorne, whose hobby was landscape-painting, and John had been fired with ambition to paint landscapes too. But Golding Constable wished his son to be a clergyman; and when he found that the youth had no inclination towards the ministry of the Church, he brushed aside the idea of painting as a profession and set him to work in the mill.

At Dedham lived the Dowager Lady Beaumont, mother of that Sir George Beaumont who has been so much ridiculed for his brown tree. But, in Constable's case, Sir George rendered services to art so great that one could forgive him not only his brown tree, but a pink buttercup or a blue moon. On one of his filial visits to the Dowager he made Constable's acquaintance, and, showing him some water-colours by Thomas Girtin, he heartily counselled the young miller to study them well. In addition to these new productions of "Poor Tom," Sir George also gave Constable a sight of a good Claude. It was the picture called by some people *The Annunciation*, and by others *The Angel appearing*

to *Hagar*, and is now to be seen in the National Gallery. Claude or Girtin, or both, made him as unwilling to devote his life to the mill as to the Church, and, at the age of nineteen, John Constable was on his way to London as the bearer of a letter of introduction to the artist Farington.

But John Constable was neither a Lawrence for dazzling precocity nor a Romney for dogged perseverance. A short experience taught him that art is a stern task-mistress, demanding long days of bitter labour from every one of her followers and rewarding only a very few with her favours in the end. He soon began to question his vocation, and his doubts were fostered by his mother, who seems to have held the opinion that painting for a living is hardly respectable, and that there is no sufficient difference between a serious painter and the "artist" on the sands who collects the coppers for his supper by going round with a hat. Besides, John loved the country; and the contrast between town and village life was then less in the town's favour than it is to-day. By the spring of 1797 he was telling an intimate friend that he had awakened



from his dream, and that he was about to enter heartily into his father's business.

Less than two years of business life sufficed to settle his problem. Having seen both sides of the question, John Constable accepted his destiny. He knew that the apprenticeship to painting, always laborious, would be more laborious than usual in his case, because he had reached the age of three-and-twenty without once thoroughly beginning those plodding and systematic exercises which most artists have completed in their teens. But he knew, also, that while a painter's career would be arduous, any other would be dishonourable and unbearable. In the year 1800 he was admitted as a student at the Royal Academy.

Benjamin West, who was President of the Royal Academy in Constable's student-days, is flouted even more scornfully than Sir George Beaumont in our times. But, even if his own canvases were indeed all hopelessly bad, West, like Beaumont, would deserve honour for his helping of Constable. West knew a great deal about the craft of painting which artists do not learn in a day, and he was generous in sharing

his knowledge. It was by a hint of West's that Constable was led to search after that exquisite silveriness which is one of the distinctive beauties of his best work. Nor did West stop short at sowing sound technical suggestions in the young man's mind. He also put courage into his heart. "Don't be disheartened, young man," he said. "We shall hear of you again. You must have loved nature very much before you could have painted this." Again, when Constable was in danger of blunting the fine but infirm edge of his talent by accepting a post as drawing-master in a school, it was West who came to the rescue. The affair was delicate; for Dr. Fisher (afterwards Bishop of Salisbury) had secured Constable's nomination to this paid post with the kindest of intentions. Somebody had to take considerable trouble in the matter, and it was cheerfully taken by the busy West. Having dissuaded Constable from accepting the post, the President forestalled Dr. Fisher's possible annoyance by breaking the news of the refusal himself.

Thus delivered from danger, Constable began to take his mission as seriously as one could

wish. To Dunthorne, the estimable plumber and glazier, he wrote :—

I am returned from a visit to Sir George Beaumont's pictures with a deep conviction of the truth of Sir J. Reynolds's observation that there is no easy way of becoming a good painter. It can only be obtained by long contemplation and incessant labour in the executive parts. And however one's mind may be elevated and kept up to what is excellent by the works of the Great Masters, still Nature is the fountain's head, the source from which all originality must spring ; and should an artist continue his practice without referring to Nature, he must soon form a *manner* and be reduced to the same deplorable situation as the French painter, mentioned by Sir J. Reynolds, who told him that he had long ceased to look at Nature, as she only put him out.

This document shows that although the writer still needed "incessant labours in the executive parts," he had already laid hold of sound principles. Indeed, the letter clearly foreshadows the Constable who uttered the famous saying that he wished to paint as if he had never seen a picture.

Until he passed the age of thirty Constable painted nothing intrinsically valuable. His *Christ Blessing Little Children*, painted in 1804 as an

altar-piece for Brantham Church, is weak and poor. The thing pleased Constable's mother and caused her to say that she "could perceive no cause or just impediment" why her son "should not, in due time, with diligence and attention, be the performer of a picture worth £3000." His second altar-piece, executed in 1809 for Neyland Church, drew from his uncle a set of twenty-five criticisms, the most delightful of which affirms that "it is scarcely justifiable for any picture to be shown so *raw*, unless a testimony be affixed that the artist died before he could finish it." In addition to these unsatisfactory altar-pieces, Constable turned out some undistinguished portraits; but he had still to find himself as a landscape-painter.

It was not only in painting that John Constable was slow in knowing his own mind and in realising his ambitions. As a man, and not merely as an artist, he lacked imperiousness. At the age of twenty-four he had met Maria Bicknell, daughter of a London solicitor, and grand-daughter of a Dr. Rhudde, the rector of Bergholt; but not until he was thirty-five did he become sure that the lady had lit in his breast

the fires of love. No wonder that his mother, in another connection, once wrote to him, "Do, my dearest son, exert yourself, or you must pine away your own prime and fret away the aged remnant of your parents' lives." The wooing and winning of Miss Bicknell required tact and dash ; for the damsel's grandfather disapproved of the match, and her family feared that she might be disinherited. But Constable quailed before the obstacles too meekly. Having been known as "the Handsome Miller," he might soon have had his way if he had not forgotten the old wisdom about faint hearts and fair ladies.

Altogether, John Constable's timid siege of Maria Bicknell lasted five years. His active operations were confined to the discharge of some mild and prudent love-letters. Indeed, to everybody who knows the circumstances, Hamerton's eulogy of John Constable's and Maria Bicknell's beautiful and faithful romance would be amazing if Hamerton's Autobiography had not so clearly defined his own limitations as a lover. The truth is that Constable's courtship is only edifying in parts. The lovers were not wholly without means, and Constable had his

health, his leisure, and his profession. Yet the pair waited until the bridegroom was forty, rather than jeopardise a legacy from a crusty old man. Constable, it is true, was for an immediate marriage and for letting the money go; but his campaign lacked spirit, and for years he endured the humiliation of receiving bulletins from sisters, cousins, and aunts as to the peppery rector's varying states of mind. This poor state of things might have lasted much longer if Dr. Rhudde had not suddenly "ceased to regard Maria as his grand-daughter" through hearing dreadful news to the effect that John had been meeting her and speaking to her in her own father's house. He renounced Maria in "*such* a letter" that the poor creature "trembled with having heard only part of it read."

Mr. Bicknell counselled more delay, meekness, forbearance, and discretion; but even Miss Bicknell's prudence and patience had their limits, and the marriage was celebrated in London on October 2, 1816. The excellent Fisher tied the knot in the church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. What would have been the bridegroom's thoughts and acts if, as he stood on St. Martin's steps, he

could have foreseen the crowds who daily ascend the other stone staircase, just across the road, to look at *The Valley Farm*, and *The Cornfield*, and *The Cenotaph*, and *The Glebe Farm*, and *Flatford Mill*, and *Barnes Common*?

Dr. Rhudde, as might have been expected, soon came to forgive and even to admire the spirited retort of his grandson-in-law and his granddaughter to the challenge he had thrown down. At first he rumbled out a conventional amount of stage-thunder, but his long-brandished bolt was never hurled. Not long after the nuptials the bridegroom received a letter from Abram Constable, his brother, containing the following passage :—

Mr. Travis [Dr. Rhudde's medical man] told us he had seen the Doctor the day before my sisters called there, and found him at first rather violent, but softened considerably before he left him. He said, "I'll not leave her a shilling." Mr. T. replied, "For God in *aven's* sake, Doctor, think of what you are doing, persecuting her in your life and after your death too; pray consider this. I'll tell you what Mr. Nann has done with his daughter, and no child can have treated a father worse than she has done; he has left her a child's part, secured to her and to her children, if she has any, and left her husband out of the question." The

Doctor replied, "Then I will do the same, and leave Maria a child's part; but with some little difference, for acting contrary to friends' wishes." On parting, Mr. T. said, "You will not depart from what you have said, Doctor?" He replied, "I will not." Thus far is something at this early stage, and not only Travis, but all in the village and around us are friendly to you, and I have no doubt things will work round, and that we may still see you and your deservedly beloved Maria received graciously at the Rectory.

It is true that, a few weeks later, the tyrant declared that he would refuse to see the newly-wedded pair in the event of their coming to Bergholt; but Christmas and the New Year recalled him to such a state of grace that Constable's sister Mary was able to report further progress. She passed on to her brother a gracious hint from the Doctor to the effect that if John would "make a proper apology to Mr. Bicknell and himself," all might be forgiven and forgotten. A complete reconciliation soon followed, and the errant pair were once more permitted to enter the Presence. Dr. Rhudde kept his word, and wrote down Maria in his will for £4000. Readers who wish to inform themselves minutely concerning the whole affair will find



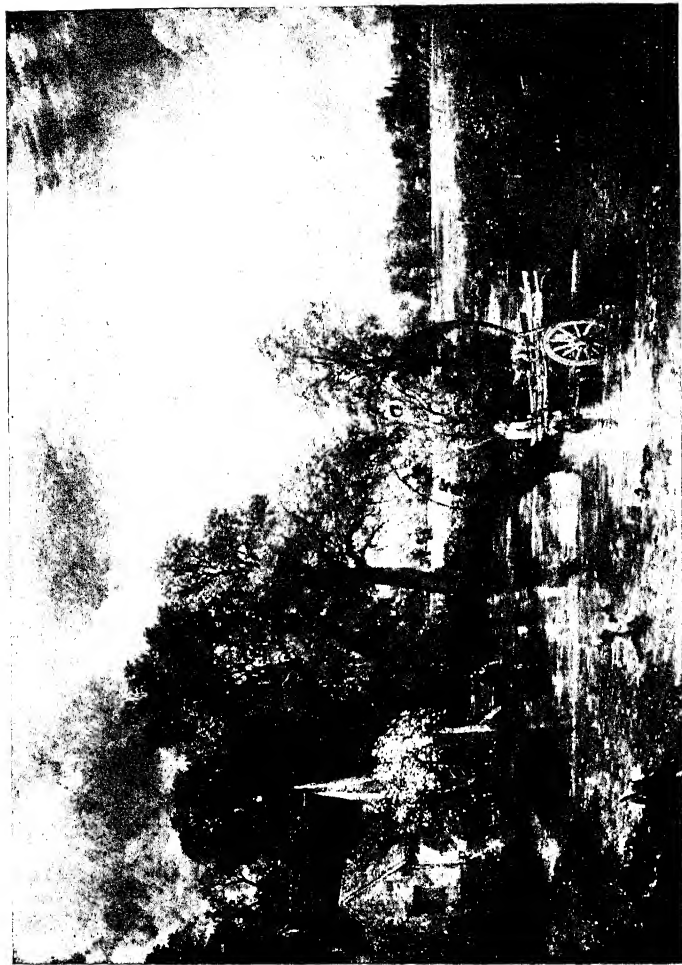
sufficient particulars, including many of the lovers' discreet love-letters, in Leslie's *Memoirs of John Constable, R.A.*, which was admirably amended and reprinted a few years ago by Leslie's son.

Not until he had been married nearly three years did a painting by John Constable deeply impress the public. In 1814 he had sold two pictures; but the purchaser of one of them, a Mr. Allnutt, who very properly resided in Clapham, had employed Linnell to paint out Constable's sky, and to paint in another of his own.<sup>1</sup> *Flatford Mill* had been almost ignored. But in 1819 *The White Horse* bore him into his own. This work, originally known as *A View on the Stour*, led to the artist's election as an Associate of the Royal Academy, and brought him fame and praise. But he had to wait for material rewards. Fifteen years ago *The White Horse*, which is now the property of Mr. Pierpont Morgan, changed owners for 6200 guineas;

<sup>1</sup> A few years later, when the artist was becoming famous, Mr. Allnutt approached Constable and asked him to restore the altered picture to its prime state. At the same time, however, he begged that the canvas might be cut down so as to match a picture by Calcott. As Allnutt had been his first buyer, Constable did not show him the door, but painted him a new picture, refusing to receive payment.

but its original price was 100 guineas only. Even this modest figure was unreal, for the *Horse's* first buyer was Constable's friend Fisher, from whom the artist bought it back for the exact sum he had paid for it. In such circumstances it was fortunate that Constable and his wife had little fortunes of their own. From his father's estate, Constable received £4000; Dr. Rhudde's legacy amounted to £4000 more, and in 1828 Mr. Bicknell left his daughter £20,000.

The National Gallery *Hay-wain*, originally and less happily known as *Landscape: Noon*, dates from 1821. But the critics and Constable's brother painters, to say nothing of the public, lacked inward preparations and dispositions for the understanding of Constable's works. He himself said, "The Londoners, with all their ingenuity as artists, know nothing of the feeling of a country life (the essence of *Landscape*), any more than a hackney-coach-horse knows of pasture." During the eighteenth century, with its urban standpoint, the best traditions of Dutch and Italian landscape-painting had almost perished out of the world. Rocks, bushes, and waters were grouped and painted primarily as



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a background or theatre for human actions and passions. Together with ruins and brown trees, these objects were built up by conventional rules of composition, into stage-pictures appropriate to a mythological or allegorical masque. The close botanical and geological observation which is evident to an excess in so many modern works was almost entirely absent from the canvases of Constable's predecessors. Like the toy-makers of the Black Forest, who have agreed upon a peg with a curly cone atop as the symbol of a tree, so these painters made certain conventional brush-marks take the places of recognisable oaks or elms, or beeches, or chestnuts. Even Gainsborough, who began by painting the oak with amazing insight and sympathy, drifted into a way of slapping vague foliage and uncertain trunks and branches into his backgrounds. Richard Wilson, who was a very great artist in many respects, might have painted finer landscapes than Constable's ; but the classical tradition held him back. "Old Crome," whose *Mousehold Heath* is in the National Gallery, did great things and had it in him to do greater ; but he passed his whole life in Norwich, and failed to correct his devotion

to Hobbema by opening his mind to contemporary influences. Girtin, the first complete water-colour painter, achieved very high things in his short life. But it would seem that the greatest painters must be painters in oils, just as the greatest musicians must use the full orchestra ; for the water-colour medium, at its best, is capable of no more than a grand piano. As for Turner, the poetic landscapes which he was painting when Constable emerged from obscurity were acceptable to the public largely because they appeared to be imbued with the current Romanticism. Constable believed that there was "room for a natural painter" ; but only a few agreed with him until after he was dead.

At the time of *The Hay-wain* Constable was living in Keppel Street, Russell Square ; but, like Dr. Johnson, he considerately kept his wife in the purer air of Hampstead. Devoted to his family, he repaired to the Heath as often as possible, and there are many sketches in the London galleries to show how he spent his hours on the breezy northern heights. Probably he was the first artist to make use of oil-paints for the memoranda which every true landscape-

painter must accumulate face to face with nature. Leslie had twenty of the fifty sky-studies which Constable made in the summer of the year 1822 alone. They were done on large sheets of thick, absorbent paper. On the back of each was noted the date of its execution, with the time of day, the direction of the wind, and any other serviceable particulars.

For a large *River Stour*, in 1822, Constable received an offer of £70 from the prescient dealer Arrowsmith, who wished the Englishman's pictures to be seen at the Paris Salon; but Constable thought it would be "disgracing his diploma to take so small a sum," and that it would be "too bad to be knocked down by a Frenchman." In 1823 he produced his *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds*, a picture in which the architectural element is certainly not despicable. Like all his greater pictures, it cost him long and hard labour, and, to recruit his health, he spent an alleged holiday with Sir George Beaumont at Coleorton; but so much time was devoted to indoors copying of Sir George's Claudes that Constable returned home with a conviction that Claude and Ostade were

"the most perfect of all masters of real chiaroscuro," and with a neuralgia which forbade solid food for a fortnight.

Unhappily, Constable refused to live a healthy life. For a worshipper of Nature he had an almost unparalleled antipathy to exercise either on a horse's legs or on his own. He never walked ; he strolled. When he was dragged off one day by the lusty old Stothard, who never donned a great-coat or boarded a hackney-coach in his life, Constable was early at work among the sandwiches, and, on reaching a crystal spring, he was found to have brought a tin cup and a bottle of rum. Nor did he correct his sluggish physical habits by a keen and varied intellectual life. Leslie believed that Constable did not read a single novel all his days. Of Miss Mitford's *Our Village* he wrote that it was "childish and unnatural," and that it seemed "done by a person who had made a visit from London for the first time, and, like a Cockney, was astonished at everything she saw." Even in his pictures he denied himself the stimulus of charming variety to such an extent that Dr. Fisher candidly reminded him of the popular saying about the

works of Claude, "When you have seen one you have seen all," and added, "I hope you will diversify your subjects this year as to *time of day*. Thomson, you know, wrote not four summers, but four Seasons. People get tired of mutton at the top, mutton at bottom, and mutton at the side, though of the best flavour and smallest size."

Despite his unvigorous health, Constable, as an artist, rapidly rose to his full stature as he neared his fiftieth year. Of his picture *The Lock* he truly said, in 1824, "My *Lock* is now on my easel ; it looks most beautifully silvery, windy, and delicious ; it is all health in the absence of everything stagnant." At the Royal Academy *The Lock* was duly admired. Fuseli (the author of the well-known saying, "Constable always makes me call for my great-coat and umbrella") found this canvas so delightful that he made a pilgrimage to it, leaning on the porter's arm, every Sunday during the continuance of the Academy's exhibition. The year of *The Lock* was also the year of Constable's first vogue in France. Arrowsmith, the naturalised French dealer, gave the artist £250 for two large pictures with the little *Yarmouth* thrown in.



There are those who assert that the great school of French landscape-painting derives from Huet and Michel rather than from Constable; and there can be little doubt that, if others have been willing to follow, Huet and Michel were capable of showing the way. But, as a matter of history, it is not fairly deniable that Constable was the occasion of this particular French revolution. As early as June, Arrowsmith wrote: "No objects of art were ever more praised or gave more general satisfaction than your pictures." Constable's friend, Brocheden said: "The French have been forcibly struck by them, and they have created a division in the school of the landscape-painters in France. . . . The next exhibition in Paris will teem with your imitators." Michel himself, years afterwards, recorded the fact that Delacroix repainted one of his own pictures after seeing Constable's. Delacroix called the Englishman "un véritable réformateur." But the most striking testimony is from the pen of the enemy. One Henry Phillips, "a most intelligent and elegant-minded" schoolmaster, to whom Constable kindly lent a hundred pounds, made a lame translation of a

Parisian attack on his friend, and sent it "with Mr. Phillips's compliments to Mrs. Constable." Here are some suggestive excerpts :—

Almost all artists have seen two English Landscapes lately sent to Paris which, it is said, are to make part of our next Exhibition at the Museum. . . . Painted in a style so different from that of our school, these two pictures at first sight produce an effect to which we are not accustomed. We soon become familiar with the manner of the author's painting, and we experience the same pleasure as the greater number of artists in seeing the vigour and richness of tone which predominate in these Landscapes, where the colour is the first and perhaps the only quality which we meet with. Seduced by this quality which they have found, certain artists, light and changeable, like a great many other Frenchmen, soon exclaimed "A miracle!" They have concluded that to do well they must imitate the English, because they understand colouring. This foolish enthusiasm . . . was all that was necessary to turn rapidly our young artists towards a style which . . . if care be not taken, can only be considered as the impudence of a false imagination and a violation of truth in every direction.

After further denouncing the style of the deplorable Englishman on the ground that it

freed the artist from all severe study, this French critic went on :—

Let us then examine with care these English paintings, the object of conversation amongst all the artists and amateurs. . . . Suppose for a moment the two pictures deprived of colour, but preserving faithfully the form of the objects, what remains? Nothing.

On the same principle Keats's *Nightingale* is nothing because, if it were denuded of its verbal colouring and melody, the propositions it contains are questionable as hard facts. Of course, Constable's glory is what he called "the evanescence of the chiaroscuro" expressed directly by subtleties of local colour. Constable was not a draughtsman, adding dead afterthoughts of colour to black and white. He was a painter. But the Parisian cried out angrily :—

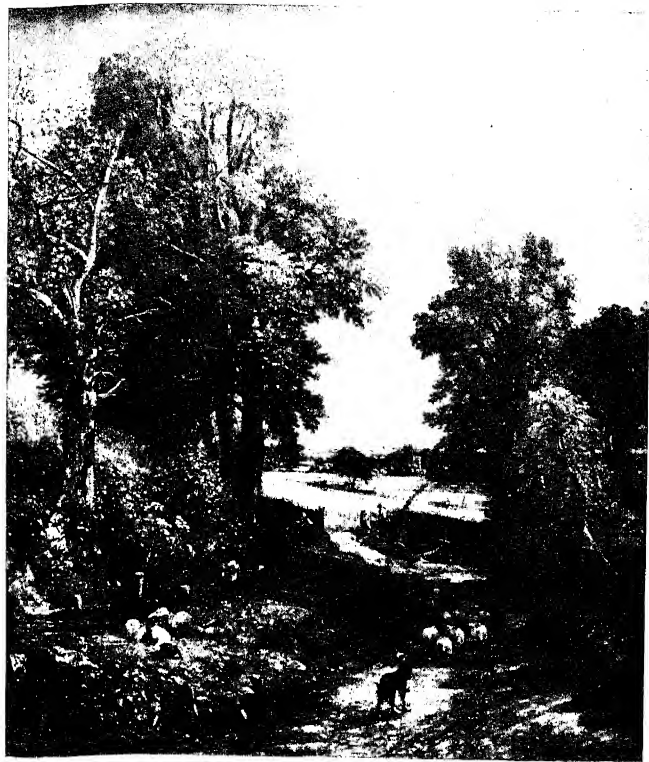
Artists, tell us, Is this what you admire? Then the noble, the celebrated Poussin is no more anything in your eyes; he did not even know the sublime art. His paintings, always beautiful, grouped with so much taste in the midst of large clumps of trees; his grounds so rich, where mountains predominate by their imposing aspect, all that is mere dotage! all that must yield before a wretched barrack simple in design, backed with enormous cauliflowers and brooms which you will call trees.

Notwithstanding these laments, Constable triumphed at the Louvre so completely that, after a few weeks, his pictures were removed from merely good positions to places of honour on the gallery walls. Louis XVIII sent the painter a gold medal, which was a great satisfaction to him : but it is to Constable's credit that in announcing the good news to Fisher, he added, "I can truly say that your early notice of me, and your friendship to me in my obscurity, was worth more, and is looked back to by me with more heartfelt satisfaction than this and all the other notice I have met with put together."

At Lille, which ranks next to Paris as a French centre of art, *The White Horse* was heartily acclaimed, and a second gold medal was soon on its way to England. It is worth noting that these honours were acceptable to Constable largely because they fortified his self-confidence as against the overpowering Turner. He said, "I daily feel the honour of having found an original style, and independent of him who would be Lord over all—I mean Turner." Thus exulting, he was inspired to produce *The Leaping Horse*, now one of the chief treasures of the Diploma

Gallery at Burlington House. Along the towing-path of the River Stour the bargees were frequently confronted by the farmers' boundary-fences, which were continued, without gates, from the fields right into the water. The well-conditioned boat-horses of Constable's day were trained to leap these fences, as represented in the picture. The bright crimson fringe on the horse's trappings, which contrasts so happily with the greens, is a departure from strict realism, and was invented by Constable as a deliberate pictorial effect—an unusual procedure with this painter. After visiting *The Leaping Horse* in the Diploma Gallery, it is worth while to go straight to South Kensington and to examine the magnificent full-size sketch in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

A quarrel with Arrowsmith, in which the picture-dealer does not appear to have been the offender, threw Constable into a little financial anxiety in 1825, and the ill-health of his family did not mend his spirits. Nevertheless he wrought, for the Academy of 1826, the magnificent *Cornfield* now in the National Gallery, and, for 1827, the beautiful National Gallery *Glebe*



THE CORNFIELD

By

JOHN CONSTABLE

*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

*Farm.* It was about this time that his father-in-law left the £20,000 legacy which enabled Constable to "stand before a six-foot canvas with a mind at ease." But his mind was not at ease for long. In 1828 Maria Constable died. Thenceforward John Constable became a sad and silent man. A few weeks after his wife's death he was made a Royal Academician; but he never recovered a light heart, and it is on record that he sat next to young Frith through a long dinner without speaking a single word.

The bereaved painter sought distraction in planning and executing, along with David Lucas, the engraver, his grand *Liber Veritatis* called *Various Subjects of Landscape characteristic of English Scenery*. The splendid mezzotints of this series proceeded from a smaller brain than that which conceived the *Liber Studiorum*: yet Constable's, in its own way, is as precious a work as Turner's. In his Introduction the painter boldly confesses his realistic faith. "The subjects of all the plates," he said, "are from real scenes, and the effects of light and shadow are merely transcripts of what happened at the time they were taken." He also sounded a patriotic note by expressing

the hope that his "little work" would promote a love of the scenery of our own country. Altogether about forty plates were engraved: but only about half of these were published in Constable's lifetime. They vary greatly in merit, and there is truth in the gibe about the blacker ones looking "as if all the chimney-sweepers in Christendom had been at work upon them": but the best of the Lucas-Constable mezzotints are glorious beyond all praise. Indeed, they are so fine that Constable's public could not appreciate them sufficiently to pay the expenses of production.

Illness and discouragement did not prevent the finishing of Constable's *Waterloo Bridge* in 1832. On and off, he had been engaged for fifteen years on this picture, which represents the ceremonious opening of the Bridge on January 18, 1817. As usual, he made several preparatory oil sketches, of which some have survived. The finished canvas, now in the Tennant collection, is the picture which Turner treated so ungenerously. Leslie tells the story as follows:—

It was placed in the school of painting, one of the small rooms of Somerset House. A sea-piece by Turner



was next to it, a grey picture, beautiful and true, but with no positive colour in any part of it. Constable's *Waterloo* seemed as if painted with liquid gold and silver, and Turner came several times into the room while he was heightening with vermilion and lake the decorations and flags of the City bargees. Turner stood behind him, looking from the *Waterloo* to his own picture, and at last brought his palette from the large room where he was touching another picture, and putting a round daub of red lead, somewhat bigger than a shilling, on his grey sea went away without saying a word. The intensity of the red lead, made more vivid by the coolness of his picture, caused even the vermilion and lake of Constable to look weak. I came into the room just as Turner left it. "He has been here," said Constable, "and fired a gun." On the opposite wall was a picture, by Jones, of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace. "A coal," said Cooper, "has bounced across the room from Jones's picture and set fire to Turner's sea." The great man did not come into the room again for a day and a half; and then, in the last moments that were allowed for painting, he glazed the scarlet seal he had put upon his picture and shaped it into a buoy.

Apart, however, from Turner's characteristic behaviour, *Waterloo Bridge* pleased neither painters nor laymen. Having attained mastery in the use of the brush, Constable seems to have

become a little bored with this tool of his trade, and he was a trifle too ready to take up the palette-knife in its place. The result was an expanse of pigments displayed in a manner for which few people were prepared. Nor was the failure of *Waterloo Bridge* Constable's only trouble in 1832. Death beckoned away several friends, including the kindly Bishop Fisher; illness camped round about his home, professional intrigues embittered his work. "I do not contemplate a happy old age," he wrote sadly to Leslie, "even if I should attain it."

By this time Constable was nearer sixty than fifty, and only four years remained to him. But these years were not his worst. They were greatedened by those noble works *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* and *The Valley Farm*. The *Salisbury Cathedral* is in private hands; but nearly everybody knows its double rainbow and its marvellous sky from Lucas's mezzotint. As for *The Valley Farm*, hardly anybody visits the National Gallery without paying it due honour. Through the kindness of Mr. Hugh Lane, whose enthusiasm for contemporary achievements in the interpretation of landscape has not blinded



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*From the Oil-Sketch in the possession of Hugh Lane, Esq.*

him to their fountains and origins, the present volume is enriched with a reproduction of a large sketch of *The Valley Farm* which the reader can compare for himself with the finished picture.

We know a good deal about *The Valley Farm* from Constable's pen as well as from his brush and his knife. With his fondness for arid titles the painter first named it *A view of Willy Lott's House*, and he said of it :—

I have got my picture into a very beautiful state ; I have kept my brightness without spottiness, and I have preserved God Almighty's daylight, which is enjoyed by all mankind, excepting only the lovers of old dirty canvas, perished pictures at a thousand guineas each, cart-grease, tar and snuff of candle.

On the point of brightness without spottiness the *Spectator* did not agree with the painter. "Constable has spoilt a charming rustic scene," wrote the critic, "by showing it, as usual, as if a shower of sleet were falling from a summer sky. He prefers his mannerism to his fame." To some extent the artist recognised the criticism as just ; for he worked further on the canvas until he believed that he had "converted the sleet and snow into silver, ivory, and

a little gold." The *Spectator* had declared, in earlier numbers, that showers of meal kept falling in Constable's foregrounds, and that he was "carrying on a Meal-Tub Plot against Nature." But probably the *Spectator's* man had never gazed with a painter's eye at a wet landscape sparkling under a bright sun. Constable knew what he was about. When Lady Morley, on seeing his *Englefield House*, cried, "How fresh, how dewy; how exhilarating!" he replied, "Half of what you have said, if I deserved it, would be worth all the talk and cant about pictures in the world."

Before completing *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* and *The Valley Farm*, Constable began his short career as a lecturer on Landscape Art. It was congenial work. Indeed, his father must have had discernment when he planned that the youth should enter the ministry of the Church; for John Constable was so confident a public speaker that he did not need to prepare an extended manuscript, but delivered his discourses from a few rough notes. His first lecture, at Hampstead, "went off immensely well." He spoke an hour and a half, and was



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*From the Painting in the National Gallery*

not once flurried. Encouraged by this success he visited Worcester in 1835, and gave three lectures there. A long and interesting summary of his remarks appeared in *The Worcester Guardian* for October 31st, 1835, a reprint of which may be found in the Earl of Plymouth's excellent little monograph on Constable.<sup>1</sup> The Worcester reporter's readable paragraphs abound in misstatements of historical fact and heresies of æsthetical doctrine; but most of these were probably the reporter's own, for Constable affirmed that the *Guardian's* editor, a very pleasant person, had "mangled, mixed up, and contradicted" all he had to say.

Theorising about art did not cause the lecturer to slacken in the practice of it. At Arundel, where he spent a pleasant July, he was so diligent that he filled jars and bottles with the earth or sand of particular spots in order to remind himself of their hue when he returned to his Hampstead studio. He would also collect lichen-covered bark and other objects appropriate to his pictures.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 130-5 of *John Constable, R.A.*, by Lord Windsor. London, 1903.

Strangely enough, the last important work which Constable completed was a picture of a painter's empty tomb. Sir George Beaumont had erected at Coleorton a monument inscribed with the name of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Constable, in *The Cenotaph*, has drawn the stone with a deer gazing through a delicate tracery of trees. *The Cenotaph*, which is in the National Gallery, has been underrated by some of Constable's admirers, who would like to see him scattering the contents of his meal-tub over every one of his pictures and turning on his sleet-storm both in and out of season. But these methods were uncalled for in the simple and poetical *Cenotaph*, and Constable, whatever the *Spectator* might say to the contrary, was not bound hand and foot to his mannerism.

On the last day but one of March, 1837, Constable saw a little beggar-girl hurt herself in the street. He crossed the roadway and cheered her up with a shilling. Leslie was with him, and the two friends parted laughing. On the morrow Constable worked hard at his *Arundel Mill and Castle*, afterwards strolling out on an errand of charity. He came home and supped



heartily ; and in the same night he died, probably from an acute attack of the indigestion to which his sedentary habits had given rise. He had not completed his sixty-first year, and his powers as a painter had not largely abated. Had he lived longer there would have been a few more great and beautiful things in the world.

One of the many bad turns which Ruskin has done to art was his disparagement of Constable. Living among people whose idea of literary criticism was to make foolish comparisons between Dickens and Thackeray, the literary Ruskin was incapable of talking Turner up without talking Constable down. He declared that he had "never seen any work of Constable's in which there were any signs of his being able to draw" ; that he had a morbid preference for subjects of a low order ; and that his storms were "greatcoat weather and nothing more." Such remarks stultify Ruskin's praise of Constable as "thoroughly original, thoroughly honest, free from affectation, manly in manner, and frequently successful in cool colour." In writing such a redundancy as "thoroughly honest, free from affectation," Ruskin cannot have been

in an attentive mood, and this was not the only occasion when he failed to set his full wits fairly to work on Constable's case.

To those who insist that some contrast between Turner and Constable must be made, it is enough to say that the very great Turner did much more than the smaller, but still great, Constable to enrich art, if art be considered as a treasure-house of masterpieces; but that Constable did much more than Turner for Art considered in its historical development. Turner's vast lake, with its bays and coves and crags and castled shores, has no outlets; but Constable's narrow and sparkling stream flows past our feet into the unknown forests and purple lowlands which stretch far away before us. It is true that too many of his followers, professing to search reverently with him into the heart of Nature, are only technicians refining upon his conventions; but this has been a phase of all reforms in art.

Constable wrote in the Introduction to his *English Scenery* :

In Art . . . there are two modes by which men endeavour to attain the same end and seek distinction.

In the one the artist, intent only on the study of departed excellence, or on what others have accomplished, becomes an imitator of their works or he selects and combines their various beauties; in the other he seeks perfection at its primitive Source, Nature. The one forms a style upon the study of pictures, or the art alone . . . the other by study equally legitimately founded in art, but further pursued in such a far more expansive field, soon finds for himself innumerable sources of study, hitherto unexplored, fertile in beauty, and by attempting to display them for the first time forms a style which is original; thus adding to the Art qualifications of Nature unknown to it before.

The last sentence is excellently said. Generally speaking, Constable's predecessors had shut their eyes to the innumerable beauties of lit and shaded and interfused local colour in Nature, and had preferred a conventional brown foundation on which to build their artificialities. Many noble works were produced by this old formula, which was sincere until the school of Constable revealed a more excellent way; but to-day it is sterile and outworn.

In labelling Constable a realist, one must be sure of one's meaning. There are realistic landscapes nowadays which are almost indistinguish-

able from coloured photographs ; and although these things are honourably hung in exhibitions, they have nothing to do with art. In Constable's works there is always a strong subjective element. His choice of a natural scene was governed by distinctly pictorial considerations. Unfortunately, the newest landscape-schools have decided that the well-rounded pictorial unity of a fine Constable is almost as bad as the artificial compositions of his predecessors, and consequently we are often called to look at blue and green and yellow squares and oblongs which appear to have been cut with scissors haphazard out of large canvases. But Constable, although he was an artist, painted so as to be understood of the people. His renderings of external things were faithful ; but they were executed with so much style and temperament that the natural objects became artistic subjects. In the best sense, his works are full of the worker. As truly as Turner, though in a different fashion, he added Man to Nature ; and surely great art knows no other way.

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